JOY-BEARING GRIEF

THE
MEDIEVAL MEDITERRANEAN

PEOPLES, ECONOMIES AND CULTURES, 400-1500

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VOLUME 57



JOY-BEARING GRIEF

Tears of Contrition in the Writings of the Early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers

BY

Hannah Hunt



BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON
2004

On the cover: Donatello, *Maddalena* (1455). Opera di S. Maria del Fiore di Firenze. Fototeca No. 0001275.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hunt, Hannah.
Joy-bearing grief : tears of contrition in the writings of the early Syrian and Byzantine fathers / by Hannah Hunt.
p. cm. — (The medieval Mediterranean ; v. 57)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 90-04-14123-5
1. Repentance—Christianity—History of doctrines. 2. Crying—Religious aspects—Christianity—History of doctrines. 3. Orthodox Eastern Church—Doctrines—History. 4. Fathers of the church, Syriac. 5. Fathers of the church, Greek. I. Title. II. Series.

BT800.H86 2004
234'.5—dc22

2004054595

ISSN 0928–5520
ISBN 90 04 14123 5

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Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill Academic Publishers, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers and VSP.

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

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ABBREVIATIONS

ed	edited by
trans	translated by
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
OC	Orientalia Christiana
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
PS	Patrologia Syriaca
SC	Sources Chrétiennes

PREFACE

The seed for this study of *penthos*[1] in the early Syrian and Byzantine Fathers was planted by reading *The Philokalia*, originally whilst researching the issue of spiritual fatherhood in the desert tradition. It became apparent that the concept of penitent weeping and mourning for sin recurred throughout the monastic tradition of the early Eastern Christian Church. Significant local variations in emphasis and interpretation came to light, with each context commenting specifically on tears as a fundamental aspect of spiritual growth and redemption. In beginning to study the Christian anthropology which underlay a number of specific parts of that tradition, I became intrigued by the conjunction of austere ascetical, (at times encratic), attitudes to the human body and its vagaries, with a strong sense of the integrity of the human person as an image of God, loved and accepted by its maker.

Isaac of Nineveh insisted that the body be used in prayer. Such corporeal involvement in worship clearly went beyond varieties of posture, or hesychastic breathing practices, to involve the shedding of real tears. The desire to shed tears of penitent grief was to be encouraged, despite the caution expressed about strong emotions by the Greek philosophers whose teachings can be traced in some Patristic sources. The Church Fathers insist actual tears should be shed; *penthos* is far more than a symbolic or metaphorical gesture. Paradoxically tears of contrition for sin were simultaneously expressive of great pain of heart and hopeful joy, a juxtaposition particularly mentioned by Klimakos, whose writings so often exemplify the desert experience. In Ephrem, unusually, the voice of the feminine half of creation found a voice, not through the writings of a female monastic but by the choice of a Biblical character who experiences a direct encounter with Jesus, in which her tears have an astounding effect. Symeon's 'newness'

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[1] Since there is no one single English word which accurately renders the full meaning, the Greek word in its transliterated form, *penthos*, will be used throughout this book. *Penthos* suggests compunction, mourning or grief for sin, expressed by tears, and is variously translated to suggest the joy-bearing element of such spiritual sorrow. Details of its lexicographical roots are explored in the introduction. Other technical terms are explained in the glossary.

was articulated by a radical reinterpretation of the locus and identification of spiritual authority in the luminous tears of the penitent.

It became clear that in order to understand why the Early Eastern Church placed so much emphasis on spiritual mourning, it was necessary to analyse particular texts with the aim of determining the theological weight of *penthos* and the Syriac concept of *abila*. This revealed both a coherence and a distinctiveness in the various authors' handling of the issue; they are, after all, not writing as systematic theologians, nor necessarily with an eye to a readership or reception much beyond the monastic cell. However, what they have to say discloses crucial insights into the mindset of the early Mediterranean Christian world, as well as raising some pertinent questions for the modern reader. Though overtly theological, these issues, where they challenge the secular or ecclesial authority of the Byzantine world, have a broader political aspect. They also suggest a subtle and at times fraught reinterpretation of Hellenistic models of personhood, especially with regard to women: they articulate a less misogynistic approach than is found in many contemporary Latin fathers. The connective tissue, as it were, is the sense of tradition (*paradosis*) common to all eastern Christian readings of texts, which transcends the temporal and geographical boundaries to which modern scholarship must adhere. *Paradosis* places *penthos* at the heart of the human experience of penitence and forgiveness, wherever and whenever it is found.

The introduction locates and describes the terms involved, and includes some comments on the lexicographical background. These disclose the primary sense of *penthos* as mourning or grieving for sin: this contrition seems to overlap with words such as *lype* and *katanuxis*, however, being godly grief it may be distinguished from mourning the loss of worldly pleasures or human relationships. It is characterised by a moment of spiritual awakening, which provides the basis for a deepening awareness of both individual and communal sin, and a desire to be restored to God. Contrite grief is expressed by weeping and lamenting, yet it may also be a joyful experience as penitents recognise their need for God's mercy. This remorse stems from a conscious—even a deliberate—moment of awakening, in which the heart is pricked, so the grief is not identical to an innate sorrowfulness or predisposition for despair or depression. In the individual's spiritual life, *penthos* is juxtaposed with and accompanied by the awareness of death and the day of judgment, which lends an eschatological subtext to the term. It is an essential element of, but not identical

to, the process of repentance, and thus the whole economy of salvation as understood by the eastern Christian tradition. Being firmly rooted in that tradition allows a Trinitarian understanding of *penthos*.

Clearly any study of this sorts needs to appraise the relevant secondary material, and this in itself provided a significant impetus to the project, since the only modern study of the subject was compiled by Irénée Hausherr in 1944. Given that the texts under discussion come from the eastern Christian part of the tradition, his western, scholastic bias seemed problematic, and in addition his methodology is not considered acceptable to modern scholars and other readers. Driscoll's methodology involving a series of detailed exegeses suggested a more appropriate approach, and it is hoped that this allows the texts to speak with an authentic voice, whilst offering a more orderly framework for analysis.[2] Throughout this book, then, a balance is sought between sensitivity to the context of the texts, which are written for very local and specific situations, and a need to extrapolate from them the teachings of the tradition as a whole. As Alfeyev notes in his recent study of Symeon, modern scholars are required to break patristic material into discrete sections and this methodology does not always reflect the synthesis of, for example, theology, asceticism and mysticism found in such writers as Mark the Hermit and Gregory the Theologian. As he puts it, 'It is only modern scholarship that tends to classify Fathers according to the pre-dominating themes of their writing'.[3] Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge such classification, whether of author or content, and place them into appropriate contexts.

Four main exponents of the experience of *penthos* are explored here. This does not at all suggest that they are the only authors who concern themselves with this topic, which can be found in the Latin Christian west and in other world religions, too. But these key writers represent distinctive strands within a tradition which blends Scripture, the received insights and wisdom of its Fathers, who are believed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, and the lived out experience of the individual within the Church community. It is a tradition in which doctrine and praxis are indivisibly melded in the human encounter with the living God, with a strong sense of eschatology holding in

[2] Driscoll (1994).
[3] Alfeyev (2000) 126.

tension past, present, and future. Each of the four key exponents is examined by detailed, contextualised exegesis of representative textual material.

The desert tradition is examined first because it underlies both chronologically and intellectually the entire ascetical tradition of the eastern Christian Church. Klimakos' *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* is still read every Lent in Orthodox monasteries. It is a classic example of desert monasticism which draws on and discloses the earliest ascetic practices within the tradition. Klimakos attributes great importance to compunction and spiritual grief, and his text is the source of the much quoted phrase 'joybearing mourning' (χαροποιοῦ πένθος). *Step 7* of Klimakos' text, *Περὶ τοῦ χαροποιοῦ πένθους* provides his specific insights into the issue of *penthos*, and this is therefore examined in detail. Just as Klimakos exemplifies the whole of the desert experience, so Ephrem may be taken as a representative of the early Syrian Church. Mourning (*abila*) underlies the meaning of Syrian monastic identity. Ephrem employs a highly developed Biblical theological syntax, which entails much symbolism, paradox and Old Testament typology, combined with an understanding of the nature of humanity which is rooted in Semitic anthropology. The texts focused on in this section all exegete the Biblical figure of the 'sinful woman' depicted in Luke 7.36–50. Isaac of Nineveh, a near-contemporary of Klimakos, provides an alternative Syrian perspective, with a more systematic analysis of the part played by tears and grieving penitence as a spiritual 'way'. Writing from a radically different perspective, Isaac employs some of the same taxonomy of compunction and spiritual grief found in his Sinaite brother. Isaac's texts are copious, and often obscure in meaning, but reveal a highly sophisticated analysis of the nature and significance of tears and weeping, and a distinctive anthropology, in which the body is seen as an important agent of spiritual growth whilst being inferior to the soul. Finally, Symeon the New Theologian's reinterpretation of the subject is considered. He illustrates the Byzantine apotheosis of the tradition of *penthos*. A reforming Abbot (ultimately banished) who had also held considerable secular power and authority, Symeon articulates the tenth century flowering of *penthos*: Krivocheine calls him 'the greatest of the Byzantine mystical writers'.[4] The significant role of his spiritual father, the Studite Symeon Eulabes, will be considered since

[4] Krivocheine (1986) 9.

Symeon corroborates the teaching of the Studite with his own mystical insights, which he frequently describes as being accompanied by tears of remorse. Throughout the full range of his writings, he stresses the importance of mourning for sins, and further develops the existing concept of tears as a second baptism, as well as reiterating Eulabes' requirement that no-one should receive communion without tears. The social and political framework of these theological insights provide challenges to specific figures in the Byzantine hierarchy, as well as contributing to a wider discussion of authority and discernment.

In pulling together these strands, the apparent paradox of 'joyful mourning' and its Trinitarian substance will be assessed, allowing the enduring importance of the subject outwith its more immediate context to be explored.

Many people have contributed to the genesis of this book. Acknowledgements and heartfelt thanks are due above all to Rev Dr John McGuckin, who as supervisor of my MA and PhD theses provided academic support, spiritual guidance and much inspiration whilst I was studying at the University of Leeds. I acknowledge with gratitude the input of Dr Hugh Pyper and members of the academic, secretarial and library staff at the University of Leeds, and fellow postgraduates, especially Stuart Burns, Simon Smith, Daniel Griggs, Ismail Albayrek. Thanks are also due to Fr Shafiq Abouzayd, Dr Sebastian Brock, Dr Susan Ashbrook-Harvey, Rev Dr Kenneth Carverley, Dr Augustine Casiday, Archimandrite Athanasias Chatzopolous, Mrs Mary Chitty, Deacon John Chryssavgis, Professor Andrew Louth, Dr Andrew Palmer, Dr Manolis Papoutsakis, Fr Jacob Thekeparampil, Dr Stephen Thomas, Dr Nathan Uglow, Bishop Kallistos Ware. All these people have helped by supplying sources, advice, and encouragement of various sorts, both academic and personal. Professor Hugh Kennedy and Julian Deahl have provided much appreciated advice in the transformation of this text from PhD thesis to book. Special gratitude is due to all at SEERI in Kerala, for kind hospitality at the 4th World Syriac Conference.

Closer to home, many thanks are due to my family for their support and tolerance, especially to my sons Adam and Symeon for coping with my absences from and within the home; to my parents Jon and Elizabeth Dixon for financial help, childcare and enthusiastic engagement with my work. Lastly, I thank Nigel, whose recent presence has enabled a personal harvest of joy after much grief.

SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS *PENTHOS* AND WHERE IS IT FOUND?

The Lexicography of Penthos and Its Distinction from Other Types of Melancholy

There is no one English word which adequately defines *penthos*. It is both a concept and an experience which relates to and permeates various aspects of the spiritual life, and since it is explored here through the writings of monks or solitaries who were not concerned with writing a systematic appraisal of what was their daily work, it is unrealistic to expect consistent, clear definitions of it within the textual tradition. Also, the practice of *penthos* evolved over a long time and a broad area, and so a variety of vocabulary was used to describe it.

Since the word is Greek, it makes sense to start with the likely Greek roots for the word and its cognates. The Greek terms *πένθος*, *κατάνυξις*, (compunction), *πόθος* (yearning) and *λύπη* (grief) are all relevant here, and it soon becomes evident that their meanings overlap. Grief for sin may be variously described as mourning, weeping, compunction, or remorse. What unites these expressions is that each is speaking of a heartfelt sorrow, expressed by actual tears, or a desire to weep, which is generated by and expressive of the mystery of divine participation. Such grief is never despair, self-pity, or mourning for human losses. It thus occupies a unique position in the crux between body and soul. It is the purified passion experienced by the penitent who, through the pricking of conscience, accepts his or her need to repent, in order to be restored to God. Such a penitent has come to terms with the conflicting pull of the inner life as well as the demands of the external. *Penthos* is a process, not a static condition. It is the remorse of the sinner as much as the charism of the perfected spiritual athlete. In the life of the mourner, godly grief—as opposed to its more secular form—expresses a Trinitarian dynamic. It is prompted by the movement of the Spirit within the heart of the mourner; its living out enables him or her to participate in the sufferings of Christ; it restores the penitent to kinship with the Father.

These theological aspects derive in part from the choice of words used and their context within the Biblical and patristic tradition.

The lexicography of the Greek word *πένθος* both reveals and conceals its meaning within the patristic context. The absence of an entry for *πένθος* in Lampe's *Patristic Greek Lexicon* leads to an initial dependence upon lexica which refer primarily to secular writings for definitions of this term. Liddell and Scott,[1] Moulton,[2] Sophocles[3] and Boisacq[4] all list under *penthos* various sorrowful emotions including grief, sorrow, and outward signs of grief including mourning for the dead. Presumably this is the sort of grieving described in Corripus' sixth century poem describing Justinian's attempt to reconquer Africa, where public mourning, the grief of the commander and tears of petition to God are all mentioned.[5]

However, these classical definitions can be no more than a starting point for exploring the meaning of *penthos* in its Christian theological context, and to determine the patristic attitude to human experience of feelings (including that of sorrow) it is essential to go further, by looking at a chief primary source for patristic writers, namely the teachings of the pagan Greek philosophers. In so doing, it is important to be aware of Spanneut's distinction[6] between parallelism and influence, and avoid simplistic assumptions that the Church Fathers were directly and deliberately shaped by their philosophical forebears, even when dealing with shared and influential sources. Much of the Hellenistic understanding of emotions relates to abstract notions of the acceptability in rational creatures of strong feelings, and how they might be governed or moderated in order to allow the mind to retain control over human integrity and autonomy. This whole area therefore relates closely to the idea of *apatheia* whether in its religious or secular sense. And so, in exploring the etymology of the word, Chantraine[7] lists *πένθος* first among nouns based on the verb *πάσχω*, meaning 'to receive an impression or sensation, experience a feeling (good or bad), endure, be chastised'. He notes that the verb originally describes a passive state. Liddell and Scott[8]

[1] Liddell and Scott (1888) 619.
[2] Moulton (1977).
[3] Sophocles (1900) 869.
[4] Boisacq (1916) 766.
[5] Corippus, trans Shea (1998) 72, 107, 176 and 196.
[6] Spanneut (1957) 30.
[7] Chantraine (1968) 881.
[8] Liddell and Scott (1888) 619.

likewise are explicit that the concept is one of receptivity, not proactivity, defining *πάσχω* as 'to receive an impression from without, to *suffer*, as opposed to *doing*', and the related noun *πάθος* as 'anything that befalls one'. Spidlik agrees with Hausherr in attributing *πένθος* to the same root as *πάθος*. He defines it in this context as 'dolor, luctus, mourning.'[9]

Peters' lexicographical study[10] explores the Stoic concept of virtue, and describes it as a state in which the emotions are extirpated.[11] In other words, the issue is the passivity of *πάθος*,[12] being something which happened to bodies and souls. He distinguishes between active powers and 'passive activation' (*πάθη*) of the body acted upon. *Πάθη*, he argues, is accompanied by pleasure or pain. Rist[13] describes how Zeno believed it was necessary to extirpate *πάθη*, which he saw as being an impulse, the result of poor judgement.[14] Chrysippus moves from the standpoint of Zeno towards an understanding of human behaviour in which:

> the ἡγευονικόν which 'decides' and 'chooses' our courses of action is more than a rational faculty. It is rather something like what we should call character or personality, and is therefore capable of both rational and irrational behaviour, according to the type of people we are.[15]

This suggests something more active, and more discerning, than Peters' concept of the fundamental passivity of *πάθος*. Rist's description of Chrysippus' understanding of *ἀπάθεια* being the 'first order pleasures' experienced by the wise man, who has chosen an appropriate and noble use of his impulses,[16] comes close to the Platonic understanding of it, in that it allows for good to come out of emotion, in the right circumstances. This can be seen in Plato's *Laws*, Book V, where, speaking of laughter and tears, he advocates moderation and balance of one urge with its contrary, and a conscious intention

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[9] Spidlik (1986) 194. This attribution is noted briefly by Jaoudi (1992), 23, but she does not provide detailed analysis of the point.

[10] Peters (1967) 152–5.

[11] Ibid., 155.

[12] This point is also made by Ware, in "The meaning of "Pathos" in Abba Isaias and Theodoret of Cyrus", *Studia Patristica* 20 (1989) 315. He specifically applies the term 'to our inner life, (where) pathos has thus the sense of an emotion or feeling suffered or undergone by the soul'.

[13] Rist (1969) chapters 2 and 3.

[14] Ibid., 32.

[15] Ibid., 220.

[16] Ibid., 45.

towards 'utter concealment of all excess of joy or grief'.[17] Elise Garrison, writing of grief and suicide in Greek drama, stresses the Classical Greek concern with moderation, and states that:

> the well-known injunction to live according to *to metron*, the mean, permeates Greek thought and may well be the essential tenet of the ancient Greek ethical system.[18]

Concern with moderation in weeping, however, is not consistently found in the patristic tradition, as demonstrated by the encratism of Syrian monasticism, and Symeon's insistence that it is possible to weep at all times. An illuminating and thorough discussion of moderation versus eradication, together with some classification of those who adhered to each position, may be found in Sorabji's extensive study of the psycho-pathology of human emotions[19] which traces the Stoic and Aristotelian debates through their transmission into Christian doctrine and beyond. He mentions, among other points, that Philo developed the concept of these two different responses to emotions as suiting different types of persons.[20] His analysis of the development of Cicero and Seneca's 'first movement'[21] concept into the Evagrian *logismoi* and into Galen's later theories demonstrates the importance of classical Greek teaching to a Christian understanding of the relationship between thought and action, what Origen (according to Rufinus) describes as a state of 'pre-passion'.[22] (He also identifies within Klimakos reference to the idea of 'first movements'.)[23] Incidentally, it could be argued that Sorabji's application of the accumulated insights into emotions to Freud, cognitive therapy and yoga illustrates the enduring human anxiety about their emotional life, in which grief of various sorts plays such a significant part.

Plato acknowledges four main *pathe* (pleasure, pain, desire and fear)[24] which he understands as intrinsically human qualities: he argues

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[17] Plato, trans Taylor (1934) 114.

[18] Garrison (1995) 5–6. Accordingly, someone can only live 'in equilibrium' when he or she has found their 'proper function.'

[19] (2000). Especially for this work, see chapters 13, 14, and 22–26.

[20] (2000) 385.

[21] 61, 66, and chapter 23.

[22] Sorabji (2000) 343.

[23] *Ladder* 15.62 and passim, (2000) 348.

[24] See Peters (1967) 155. Sorabji (2000) 29 explains that these are seen as 'generic' emotions under which all others may be arranged.

therefore it is the *use* of these emotions, the controlling of them, which needs care, not their actual *existence*. The image he uses is the division of 'each soul into three parts, two of which had the form of horses, the third that of a charioteer': since one of the horses is noble and one base, they pull in opposing directions, representing the conflicting desires of human conscience.[25] These are not dissimilar to the Stoic classification of passions into fear, appetite, pleasure and *lype*, translated as either pain or illness: Arius Didymus apparently broke this last into 10 types, of which *penthos* was one. He interpreted it as being 'grief at untimely death'.[26]

Aristotle sees the virtuous life as one in which passions and emotions exist, but are used to positive end, and, as in Plato, tempered with moderation. In Book II, 2 of the *Ethica Nicomachea*[27] we find the advice to 'avoid excess': temperance is listed as the second virtue after courage in Book III, 10. Aristotle thus advocates a transformation of passions rather than their extirpation. Evidently, both Plato and Aristotle allow for more creative and positive potential in the existence of emotion than do their Stoic counterparts.

Whilst the Patristic focus is on the theological working out of the emotional life, and not its philological articulation, individual writers may tend more to the Stoic, Platonic or Aristotelian interpretation of emotions and their place in human spirituality. Kallistos Ware uses this distinction in his studies of the attitude of the early fathers to emotion. His writing on *apatheia* and *enkrateia*[28] provide a useful analysis of the predilections of particular Fathers. He claims that Philo's assumption of the negative Stoic view, in which passions are viewed as unnatural or 'even directly sinful'[29] was followed by Clement of Alexandria, Nemesius of Emesa, Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius of Pontus and John Klimakos. Defenders of the more positive position, represented by Plato and Aristotle, include, according to Ware, Abba

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[25] This may be found in *Phaedrus*, 46ab, 253c–254b. This is cited by Ware (1989). Ware points out that Plato is inconsistent about this issue. Substantially the same material and arguments are found in Ware's article in Wimbush/Valantasis (1995).

[26] See *Cicero and the expression of grief*, by Andrew Erskine, chapter 2 of Braund (1997).

[27] Trans Ross (1925).

[28] "The way of the Ascetics: negative or affirmative?" (1995) and "The meaning of "Pathos" in Abba Isaias and Theodoret of Cyrus" (1989). These two contain much common ground.

[29] Ware (1995) 11–12.

Isaias, Theodoret of Cyrus, Dionysius, Maximus and Gregory Palamas.[30] From this, Ware concludes that the fathers maintain passions should be transformed, not destroyed, since it is only the distortion of emotion by ignoble or unilluminated motives which causes it to be undesirable. Here a connection back to the lexicographical roots of πένθος is illuminating: the Christian understanding is of *godly* grief, a sadness which is appropriate because rather then being selfishly indulgent, it takes responsibility for sins committed. Chryssavgis likewise feels that the patristic tradition extols the transformation of the passions, citing Isaiah of Scetis, whose second ascetic discourse suggests that:

> anger, jealousy, even lust—are given to us by God with a particular and sacred purpose . . . the original purpose of anger is for it to be used against injustice in the world . . . Wrongful passions are a diversion from true passion.[31]

Obviously within the Syrian tradition the word *abila* takes the place of *penthos*. This word is derived from a Syriac root meaning mourning. The tradition clearly demonstrates that this is godly rather than worldly mourning, and the term serves to define the very identity of the monk, whose grief is remorse for sin, a bereavement of God's favour. The common ground between Greek and Syriac terminology is shown by by the shared use of the word *πενθοῦντες* (*abiluta*, state of mourning) to describe the monastic: in both traditions, the monk is identified as mourner. Klimakos says that 'the monk is a mourning soul'.[32] The Greek word is predominantly used to describe the experience of weeping and lamenting for sin: Ross uses the word *penthos* to describe the Syrian tradition. As with *penthos*, so *abila* serves as a generic term to describe the condition of a continual state of repentance expressed through physical tears and lamenting. The term becomes in certain contexts synonymous with that of the monk, the solitary one, or *ihiyadutha* whose single-minded adherence to a life devoted to repentance is characterised by a mournful face and demeanour. The enduring importance of tears in the Syrian tradition is attested by the account of Miller, whose translation of Isaac's *Homilies* is invaluable, of two twentieth century elders who 'Both wept unceasingly and always had a handkerchief nearby wherewith to wipe their tears. They were unable to pronounce the blessed name

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[30] Ware (1989) 320, 321.
[31] Chryssavgis (2003) 57 and see also 59.
[32] *The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 1*, 4, PG 88, 633C, Moore (1959) 50.

of our Saviour . . . without tears welling up in their eyes in evident compunction'.[33] Isaac is believed to have drawn for his ascetic vocabulary on not only previous Syriac writers but 'Syriac translations of Greek ascetical and theological works'.[34] He would therefore have been familiar with the term *penthos*.

Patristic Distinctions Between Compunction, Mourning for Sin and Melancholy

Pulling all this together, a rich and not entirely unambiguous sense of *penthos* appears. Turning from the vocabulary of penitent grief to its expression, it seems that the ambiguity continues. At times a writer draws distinctions between nuanced meanings, the most significant being between godly sorrow and grief over worldly affairs. This is a concern found throughout the tradition, where *lype* and *penthos* may have interchangeable meanings, or may be used to express different emotions. Amma Syncletica mentions different types of sadness, of which the only desirable one is groaning for one's sins.[35] This seems to reflect the Pauline distinction (2 Cor. 7.10) that 'the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death'. Hesychius' lexicon defines λύπη as 'distress of mind or body', which Paul qualifies with κατὰ θεὸν (according to God, godly). Cassian comments that this specific use of the word demonstrates the only useful aspect of 'dejection', namely:

> when we yield to it either in penitence for sin, or through being inflamed with the desire of perfection, or the contemplation of future blessedness.[36]

In other words, it is the intention behind the emotion, the motivation for it and its aim, which determines whether the grief is godly or worldly. Grief may be coloured by the *logismoi*[37] which give rise to

[33] Miller (1984) xli.
[34] Miller (1984) cviii.
[35] PG 28, 1512.
[36] *Institutes*, Book 9, chapter 10, trans Gibson (1995) 266.
[37] *Logismos* may be taken to be not just any thought but the antecedent to that thought. Ware's definition in the glossary at the end of each volume of *The Philokalia* mentions in particular the demonic impetus which underlies unhelpful thoughts and deeds.

it. The conscious deliberation behind penitent grief may also be expressed by a sincere desire to weep which fails to bear fruit: Nilus urges that if you are unable to actually shed tears, then you should at least imagine your soul weeping 'and shed tears before God in your intention, and thus you can be purified from sins'.[38]

The godly intentions behind weeping are therefore important, and so too is a real awareness of the dangers of the wrong sort of grief. John the Solitary distinguishes between melancholy thoughts as a vice, born of evil thoughts and focused on worldly affairs, and *penthos*.[39] Monastic texts from throughout the tradition attest to the destructive and sapping nature of depressive melancholy.[40] Evagrios is explicit that living in the world, and being attached to worldly things, makes inevitable the experience of *lype* derived from desire or cupidity: sadness, he says is 'a deprivation of sensible pleasure, whether actually present or only hoped for' so continued 'affection' or attachment to something in the world makes it 'impossible to repel this enemy'.[41] By contrast, one of the two 'peaceful states of the soul' which is close to apatheia consists of 'Humility together with compunction and tears, longing for the Infinite God, and a boundless eagerness for toil'.[42] In other words, the only thing to long for, and grieve at not having, is God.

Yearning for God, rather than envy of worldly riches, is, in this context, the appropriate sort of grief and sense of loss. Gregory of Nyssa, in his *Homilies on the Beatitudes*, defines sadness and its opposite in similar terms:

> Beatitude, in my opinion, is a possession of all things held to be good, from which nothing is absent that a good desire may want . . . the opposite is misery, . . . being afflicted unwillingly with painful sufferings . . . The one thing truly blessed is the Divinity itself.[43]

Here again is the emphasis on the importance of the underlying intention: it is those things *which a good desire may want* which are to be sought, the prime desideratum being restoration to the likeness of God himself. Gregory, too, refers to St Paul's use of the word

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[38] *Ep 3*, 257, PG79, 512, quoted Hausherr (1982) 173.
[39] *Dialogue 4*, quoted by Hausherr (1939) 99.
[40] Abba Isaiah, *Logos 16*, quoted Špidlík (1986) 251.
[41] *Praktikos*, 19, trans Bamberger (1981) 21.
[42] *Praktikos*, 57, trans Bamberger (1981) 32.
[43] *Homily on the Beatitudes*, 1, PG 44 trans Graef (1954) 87.

lype by way of exegeting 'Blessed are those who mourn',[44] and relates mourning specifically to the soul: *penthos*, he says 'is a sorrowful disposition of the soul, caused by the privation of something desirable'.[45]

Since the liturgical expression of faith is not, in the eastern Christian church, separated from its doctrine, liturgical texts are important witnesses to the tradition, and in any case often derive from patristic writings. The Sunday before Lent is designated 'the Sunday of Forgiveness on which we commemorate the casting out of Adam from Paradise.'[46] In the order for Matins, the focus returns continually to the figure of Adam, naked without his robe of glory, painfully aware of his fault:

> Banished from the joys of Paradise, Adam sat outside and wept, and beating his hands upon his face he said: 'I am fallen, in Thy compassion have mercy on me'.[47]

So here, the 'privation of something desirable' is expressed explicitly in terms of Adam being cast out of Eden. In such texts, Adam is portrayed as mourning for the loss of paradise, having become aware of his sin, and his need of God. He is the first man, banished from the presence of God who created him, because of sin.[48] Perhaps in conscious imitation of Adam's grief, the tenth century Armenian *Commentary on the Divine Liturgy* by Xosrov Anjewac'i comments on the part where catechumens are shown the door:

> Since it is Christ who is sacrificed, those who are impure or defiled in spirit should leave, for they are not worthy to exult in the spiritual joy. They should admonish one another with the holy scriptures and pray at the doors. *With mournful heart and fervent tears let them lament their exclusion.*[49]

He notes that those who remain inside for the rest of the liturgy should 'stand in fear and trembling', offering supplication 'with sighs and fervent tears to be cleansed from everything and draw near pure and clean.[50]

These specific references to Adam's grief at being cast out of Eden mirror perhaps the intrinsic nature of eastern Christian liturgy: it is

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[44] *Homily on the Beatitudes*, 3, PG 44 trans Graef (1954) 107.
[45] *Homily on the Beatitudes*, 3, PG 44, 1224A, trans Graef (1954) 109–10.
[46] *Lenten Triodion*, trans Ware/Mary (1977) 168ff.
[47] *Canticle Six, Ikos*, trans Ware/Mary (1977) 175.
[48] This has been elaborated on in Staretz Silouan (1975) 47ff.
[49] Anjewac'i, trans Cowe (1991) paragraph 41, 133.
[50] Anjewac'i, trans Cowe (1991) paragraph 105, 181.

catanyctic in its contents and focus. Špidlík describes the very structure of Orthodox liturgy as expressive of remorse for sins, noting the repeated requests in the Kyrie for remission of sins: 'They unfold in an atmosphere of *penthos*. Far from being sad or pessimistic, however, the Eastern ascetics proclaimed a joyous faith: sin is the only evil, and it can always be wiped out by repentance'.[51] Instructions for performance of the liturgy may include that of *katanyktika*, 'to be sung in the mode of mourning and compuction'.[52] A modern listener to non-liturgical music may easily connect this liturgical focus to the tenor of works by John Tavener, whose music is profoundly influenced by his Orthodox faith.

The catanyctic mood of orthodox worship is not restricted to the daily offices; it is also found in the office of *megaloschemos*, the third and highest stage of admission as a monk, in which the choir sings the troparion of the Prodigal Son, a favourite exemplar of penitence. The second antiphon provides this chant:

> Having received, in the mystical fountain of regeneration, adoption and redemption, and yet having wasted my life in negligence and in sins, I now cry to thee, good Lord: Grant me a fountain of tears of penitence and wash away the stain of my sins, almighty and merciful Saviour.[53]

The joyful nature of such tears is stressed in this office.

Within the medieval monastic context, there is an interesting tension between the penthotic nature of liturgy and the use of music, which perhaps needs some explanation. Much of the debate focuses on the prevailing mood of lamentation in the psalms (of which more shortly) and three modern writers focus on how the singing of psalms affects or is affected by *penthos*. Gale[54] and Ware[55] refer to Hausherr[56] in this regard: their starting point is the section of Hausherr's book entitled 'Obstacles to penthos', in which he cites Paul Evergetinos' use of anecdotes by Abba Pambo and Abba Sylvanus. The fathers remind a young brother that florid singing of psalms causes pride and hardens the heart against compunction; they insist that the appro-

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[51] Špidlík (1986) 354.
[52] This instruction is found in connection with singing verses at Matins and Vespers.
[53] Cited in Gothóni (1993) 62.
[54] Gale (1985).
[55] Ware (1994).
[56] Hausherr (1982).

priate accompaniment for psalmody should not be melody but groaning.[57] So whilst *penthos* clearly features prominently in liturgy, is it inconsistent with psalmody? Alfeyev notes that although Christian hymns were part of the monastic office, 'early monks were not usually in favour of developed hymnody and preferred psalms to any other kind of singing.'[58] Gale points out that plain styles of psalmody were advocated for use in monasteries but that outside the monastic setting, different styles of psalmody were practiced, reflecting the context.[59] This matter of appropriateness is important; the tradition emphasises in all matters the monastic quality of *diakrisis* (discernment), in order to determine the right pathway. Gale explains the possible contradictions here by understanding *penthos* as akin to meditation (the continual engagement with the holy scriptures) which permeates the life and liturgy of the first monks. Although he accepts Hausherr's attribution of music as an 'obstacle' to *penthos*, he sees in appropriately sung psalmody the basis of compunction, which itself feeds and sustains contrition:

> It is this continual recitation and rumination on biblical texts, stored in the memory, that forms the basis of the *penthos* oriented liturgy of the monastic tradition.[60]

Davril, basing his discussion of psalmody[61] on the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, also finds evidence that 'psalmody is one of the principal sources of compunction, that fundamental virtue of monastic spirituality.'[62]

Ware's contribution to this particular debate also stresses the appropriateness of a particular style of singing, and he further divides monastic practice into that of sketes and that of coenobia.[63] He argues that the point of Paul Evergetinos' story is to remind his monks of the need for restraint, since excess is likely to extinguish *penthos*: this, of course, resonates with the emphasis on moderation already discussed in connection with the Hellenistic antecedents to the tradition.

So there is evidence in both the monastic and lay church at this time of mourning for sin being expressed as something qualitatively

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[57] Hausherr (1982) 106–9.
[58] (2000) 75.
[59] Gale (1985) 22.
[60] Gale (1985) 19.
[61] Davril (1987).
[62] Davril (1987) 136.
[63] Ware (1994) 333.

different to worldly mourning. The connections made between *penthos* and liturgy and psalmody sharpen the distinction between godly and other grief. Both the eremitic practice of chanting psalms and the catanyctic content of the liturgy, with its plethora of scriptural citation, and emphasis on lamenting for sin and pleas for mercy, emphasise a grief which is focused not on human emotion but on the relationship between God and sinner, and the sinners' grief at the distance they have placed between themselves and God. This is radically different to cultic lamentation, the loss and despair of human bereavement, depression or other manifestations of loss and sadness. An example of cultic lamentation would be the Egyptian cult of Isis and Osiris, where the death and resurrection of the God provide an opportunity for catharthis for the populus. Gilhus describes how 'the emotions of the gods were acted out in the cult: people wept, wailed and wounded themselves when Osiris died, and shouted with joy when he was found.'[64] In the practice of *penthos*, however, there is less a general grief about loss of a loved one, than an awareness of one's own mortality, which connects with repentance and the day of judgment. The survey of secondary material explores this in more depth,[65] and here it suffices to say that repentance and *penthos* are obviously closely connected. Both describe a continual process in which individuals become aware of their sins, regret them, and knows that they cause a division and distance from God. Both are, potentially, continual states because of the post-fall human condition. Since the eastern Christian understanding of salvation is one of recapitulation,[66] repentance should only cease when deification has been achieved, as John Chrysostom acknowledges, suggesting that 'this life is in truth wholly devoted to repentance, penthos and wailing . . . it is necessary to repent, not merely for one or two days, but throughout one's whole life'.[67]

Whilst bearing many similarities, however, repentance and mourning for sin can be distinguished in terms of the subject and object of the grief. Repentance is to do with restoring the relationship between the individual and God, through regret for sins committed and a desire to amend in future. *Penthos* has the same basic framework,

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[64] Gilhus (1997) 52.

[65] See especially the comments on Chryssavgis and Ware.

[66] This theme is found throughout Irenaeus' works, whence it permeates patristic thought.

[67] Chrysostom, *De Compunctione*, 1,1, PG 47, 395, trans in Chryssavgis (1990) 5.

but the object of the regret is not just self, but others.[68] The mourning is not just for sins committed by oneself, but for the fallen state of all humanity. The other-orientedness of mourning for sin is a significant marker, and echoes the willing kenosis and self-sacrifice of Christ. Isaac in particular stresses that through tears of grief it is possible to share in the sufferings of the sinless Saviour, and thereby partake also in his resurrection.[69] Since *penthos* constitutes a participation in the economy of salvation, it is unsurprising to find spiritual mourning mentioned often in conjunction with awareness of death. The spiritual labours of tears, prostrations and fasting take place on earth, within the human body with all its senses and desires tugging at the leash. Yet the illuminated individual knows that death is always close at hand, and that *theosis* will only be completed outside the bounds of human time. Klimakos, for example, frequently reminds his reader to repent now in order to avoid the terrors of hellfire. More positively, the penitent may participate in the joy of Paradise, and this hope renders the experience of penitent grief a joyful as well as painful event. In this emphasis on the imminence of death, penitent weeping acquires a profoundly eschatological aspect.

Katanuxis (compunction) has been mentioned as a word often used interchangeably with *penthos*, and it is worth looking briefly at this in order to come to a fuller understanding of the distinctiveness of *penthos*. Louf describes compunction in the Cistercian tradition, using terms similar to those in Acts 2.37, where the disciples are 'pricked in their heart':

> As soon as the heart is touched by the word of Scripture, the reader pauses, wounded and struck by the sword of the word of God. The ancient writers used the Latin term "compunctus" to describe this. It means literally wounded or pierced as by a sword. The word pierces our heart and touches our very soul. This is what the letter to the Hebrews means when it speaks of the word of God being like a sharp sword (Heb. 4.12).[70]

It is as if the pricking of the heart had punctured the soul, allowing the tears within to flow freely. (Elkins[71] suggests that this sense of

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[68] Špidlík notes that whereas repentance is personal, mourning for others is a sign of charity, (1986) 194.
[69] Romans 8. 17.
[70] (1989) 97.
[71] (2001) 152ff.

compuction led to the many depictions in medieval and subsequent art of Jesus' body pierced on the cross, accompanied by the weeping figure of the Mother of God.) Louf notes that this moment of awareness may lead, during *lectio divina*, to effortless tears. Hausherr sees *katanuxis* as 'a synonym, or nearly that, of *penthos*.'[72] Špidlík follows Hausherr in making the important connection between *penthos* and *katanuxis*, which he translates as compunction and describes as 'practically synonymous with *penthos*'.[73] Hausherr notes that there is no obvious scriptural source for his interpretation of the term *katanuxis*. The use of it in Romans 11:8 actually offers the reverse meaning to that of compunction in the sense of the conscience being pricked: it is normally understood as a deep sleep, a sense of absence of consciousness rather than its presence.

Katanuxis may be defined as that pricking of the heart, or conscience, which acts as a catalyst to repentant thoughts and deeds. It is an essential component of the whole process of mourning for sin, and may be distinguished from *penthos* in that it tends to refer to a particular moment of awakening, the physical sensation of the heart being pricked, whereas mourning is more of a continuous movement. However, there is some interchangeability between the two words; Klimakos talks of *penthos*, not *katanuxis* as being 'the golden spur' to a prepared soul. Perhaps the distinction lies in the fact that whilst *katanuxis*, like *penthos*, refers to a moment of consciousness of sin, *penthos* is the actual expression of it. *Katanuxis* is 'the mother of tears'[74] because it shocks the penitent out of complacency, bringing to the surface of the mind and heart a painful awareness of having lost God's favour. As with the distinction between worldly melancholy and godly grief, the significance lies not in the choice of word used to express the emotion, but in the spiritual movement which underlies it, the spiritual catalysing of the *logismoi* which generate actions. The writers at this period were not overly concerned about maintaining discrete meanings for the words they used; their concern was far more with communicating the importance of feeling, in the right way, emotions which would lead to spiritual growth. Having examined the nuances of interpretation and meaning of *penthos*, it is now possible to place it within the context of this current study, to see how it fits in to the geographical and historical parameters.

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[72] (1982) 7.
[73] (1986) 194.
[74] John Chrysostom, *De Compunctione* 1, 7, PG 47, 404.

Expressions of Grief for Sin in the Medieval Mediterranean World

Penthos is not confined to the Syrian or Greek speaking Byzantine world. In fact, the original need to restrict research to these areas demonstrates its ubiquity as a concept in the Christian world, and for the purposes of a study focusing on Medieval Mediterranean issues, such selection becomes essential. The concept of grieving for sin, or accounts of often dramatic weeping and lamenting flourish, for example, in English medieval mystics such as Margery Kempe, in the imagery used by John of the Cross to describe the 'dark night of the soul', and in modern evangelical revivals. The late tenth century Gregory of Narek is known in the Armenian world for his self-styled *Book of Lamentations*, a book that includes 'prayer, eulogy, panegyric, commentary, canticle, lament, hymn, curse'.[75] Clearly influenced by Byzantine thought, and saturated in the writings of the Cappadocians, Chrysosytom, Irenaeus, Aphraat and Ephrem as well as the psalms, Narek writes colourfully of grief for sin, drawing on a common image of the spirit as rudderless without God, seeking the safe harbour of God's favour (there are similarities to the use of this image by Isaac). Whilst invoking cultic lamentation for contemporary political and military disasters[76] it is also clear that Gregory is also connecting himself with the wider spiritual practice of *penthos*, albeit in its Armenian form. The fifteenth century Manuel Paleologos wrote a series of verses known as 'Catanyctic Chapters'.[77] Doherty's interesting study of Russian eremitical life[78] illustrates the common ground between much Russian spiritual teaching and the patristic tradition: particular links are that tears (being indicative of penitence), represent union with God who shares in the suffering of mankind[79] (the chapter on Isaac will bring this out more fully); and that they are a gift of the Holy Spirit which wash away the cloud of impurities from the soul.[80] Theophan the Recluse, a Russian Orthodox monk living in the nineteenth century, writes of tears and contrition as a normative experience

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[75] C'opanean, quoted in Lazinyan (1984) 115.

[76] This is explored in my communication for the 33rd Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, 1999, 'Penitence and Spiritual Grief in Gregory of Narek's *Book of Lamentation*' (unpublished).

[77] They may be found in PG 156, 576ff.

[78] Doherty (1975).

[79] Doherty (1975) 118–20.

[80] Doherty (1975) 164.

when praying,[81] so evidently the tradition continues in those parts of the Christian world which adhere to eastern Christian teachings.

Outside the Christian world, grief for sin features in Sufi thought, where prayer is described as the 'trapped soul's cry of lament evoked by suffering because of his separation from and striving eagerly to be united with the Beloved',[82] an intriguing similarity to Gregory of Nyssa's description. Hourani, describing the 'pervasive' influence of Christian monks on Muslims in the seventh century, cites a contemporary account of how the believer 'wakens grieving and goes to bed grieving' because of past sin and fear of God's response to this.[83] Whilst this is devoid of the joy-bearing grief of *penthos* it bears some similarities to the certain aspects of the Christian tradition. Wensinck describes the influence on Islam of charismatic weeping, leading to the devlopment of 'a certain class of men, the "weepers", who devoted themselves to an ascetic practice. But weeping also occurs in Islam as an ordinary rite during the believers' *haǧǧ* at various stages of this.'[84] A thirteenth century *Exposition of the code of behaviour for those who bear the Qur'an* from Damascus advises prostration and weeping in order to induce humility, and cites the Prophet: 'Recite the Qur'an and weep, and if you do not weep, then induce tears in yourselves'.[85]

In the modern world, where it could be argued that psychological therapy has replaced some of the function of spiritual guidance, the expression of grief about aspects of oneself may be a significant catalyst to personal growth. Writing on the experience of and healing from depression within an eastern Christian viewpoint, Archimandrite Logothetis cites John Chrysostom and Gregory Palamas[86] as having useful insights into the medical condition. Archimandrite Vlachos subtitles his *Orthodox Psychotherapy* 'the science of the fathers', explicitly identifying his attempt to integrate contemporary psychological insights about human wholeness and integrity with the eastern Christian understanding of anthropology as being a unity of *nous, kardia* and *psyche*.[87] The Anglican hermit, Maggie Ross, writes with insights taken from both the Syriac fathers and modern psychology, and

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[81] See Chariton of Valamo (1966), 117, 128, 144, 241, 266, 274.
[82] Stepaniants (1994) 59.
[83] Hourani (1991) 73.
[84] Quoted Huidberg (1962) 146.
[85] *Qur'an* 17.109, cited Renard (1998) 57.
[86] Logothetis (2000) 59–61.
[87] Vlachos (1994), especially 143, 183, 252, 280 and 320.

more will be said about her work when considering the secondary material on the subject.

But there is plenty within the eastern territories of the Medieval world to provide the basis for a coherent appraisal of the subject. Common theological and pragmatic experiences of God and his Church bind together a desert father, a Byzantine abbot, a Syrian monk and a deacon, who are the narrators in this account. Although to some extent isolated exemplars of the tradition, the geographical and chronological breadth presented by these four writers actually articulates the centrality and ubiquity of *penthos* throughout the wider tradition. In examining the eastern Christian tradition, it is significant that this is restricted to those writing primarily in Greek or Syriac, rather than Latin, those whose adherence is to Constantinople rather than Rome. The mindset which is expressed by these languages and cultures tends to have a different understanding of tradition to that held by Latin thinkers. The common termination 'Orthodox', as applied to not only Greek and Syriac but also, for example, Armenian and Coptic, unfortunately conveys a pejorative sense and so the less loaded phrase 'eastern Christian' seems more appropriate. It also describes more comprehensively the location of these writers, who come from Syria, Sinai and Constantinople. The languages used are only one feature of this part of the Christian tradition. Far more significant is a shared understanding of the very nature of 'tradition' which they know as *paradosis*, described by Athanasios as the 'teaching and faith of the Universal Church from the very beginning, which the Lord gave, the Apostles preached, and the Fathers preserved'.[88] In other words, it is a synthesis of Biblical teaching, the example of Christ and the practical outworking of those messages in daily life. Fundamental to this sense of tradition is that doctrine and praxis cannot be separated, and any speculative theology which is divorced from practical experience may be viewed with suspicion. Evagrios' insight that 'If you are a theologian you truly pray. If you truly pray you are a theologian'[89] is much-quoted because it conveys such an accurate picture of the situation, and the debt of many subsequent writers, especially Isaac, to Evagrios merits more attention than there is scope for here. Modern eastern Christian commentators strike a balance between the received tradition of their church and

[88] Alfeyev (2000) 6 quotes *Serapion 28* [593C–96A].
[89] *Chapters on Prayer*, 60, trans Bamberger (1981) 65.

conventional theological language. For example, Louth, writing about the relationship between doctrine and mysticism, suggests that the fundamental doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation are 'mystical doctrines formulated dogmatically.'[90] The eastern Christian tradition is rooted in empirical knowledge, since it is a living tradition inspired by the movement of the Holy Spirit from generation to generation. The most prolific modern exponent on tradition is Kallistos Ware: describing the move from monastic to scholastic theology, he comments:

> Eastern theologians also employ deductive reasoning, but for most of them the main emphasis lies elsewhere—in an appeal to Tradition: Tradition as embodied in the Fathers and the conciliar canons; Tradition as expressed also in the experience of the saints and holy men living in our own time.[91]

This emphasis on a particular, and peculiarly eastern Christian, understanding of tradition underpins much of the distinctiveness of approach found in the four writers explored here. It separates them from the Rome-based, Latin approach, whose understanding of atonement and sin is so radically different, although it is also, of course, informed by Biblical and patristic teachings. An important factor in this difference of approach is explained by the actual sources of teaching about grieving and tears: the Mediterranean world was significantly influenced by both Jewish and Greek culture. The Hellenistic input is apparent in the vocabulary and interpretations of emotions, as explored above, whereas the influence of Jewish thought is seen predominantly in the scriptural basis of Christian religious reading and meditation.

The Semitic Provenance of Penthos

Earlier parts of this section give examples of penitent grief in traditions which predate the monastic world on which this book focuses, and it is now possible to move from a rather abstract analysis of what the term means and from where its vocabulary derives to find specific instances of it in the written and oral tradition which informs and infuses Christianity, namely the Hebrew Scriptures. Whether a hermit or coenobite, the monk's bedrock of daily prayer and contemplation

[90] Louth (1981) xi.
[91] Ware (1973) 20.

was the psalter. The commonest type of psalm is the lament, which, as the name suggests, mentions weeping or groaning for sin. Weiser comments on the Babylonian sources of laments, and provides a detailed analysis of different aspects of the lament as a poetic form.[92] In common with other commentators, such as Gillingham,[93] he makes the distinction between communal lament and individual lament. The lament was a long-established poetic form, and may have been used in cultic worship, to express mourning for the plight of a fallen nation, or some other event which affected a whole community—perhaps the type of disaster mentioned in Chryssipis and Narek. Babylonian practices involved 'weeping and mourning rites, exultation and joy at cult places at festivals developed into independent forms in the life of the people . . . applied to a dying god, who is the vegetation of spring, and the grain.'[94] The Hebrew Scriptures contain numerous instances of such grief, which may be read symbolically as well as literally. The interpretation of such passages may be determined by the choice of language, which is sometimes formulaic, with the vocabulary of grief being a symbolic device, a literary convention as well as a direct expression of the poet's feelings. For the original reader, the sense of grief and loss would resonate with the fundamental Jewish experience of exodus, exile and bondage. For the Christian, the focus of the symbolism shifts: the sense of loss and exile becomes metaphoric and personal, as much as historical and corporate. The sense of the communal is still there, but the monastic appropriation of the psalms (especially those seen as penitential psalms),[95] as the backbone of their daily, private prayer focuses more on the experience of the loss of God's favour, incurred through wrongdoing. The lamenting takes on a specifically penitential flavour, and expresses an individual, as well as a shared, experience.

The structure and content of these psalms share certain common features. Many open with a conventional invocation to God to listen to the prayers and laments of the petitioner.[96] They express a relationship of dependence on God's mercy, and a reliance on his power

[92] Weiser (1962) 66ff.
[93] Gillingham (1994) 149ff.
[94] Huidberg (1962) 110.
[95] Weiser lists these as 6, 32, 51, 102, 130 and 143. Of these, he claims that only numbers 32, 51 and 130 are 'proper penitential prayers.' (1962) 77.
[96] For example, Pss. 3.4; 4.1; 5.2; 9.12; 10.17; 18.6; 22.2; 28.1,2; 30.8; 34.6; 40.1; 55.1,2,17; 88.1–3, 19; 120.1; 141.1,2; 142.1–12; 143.1.

and ability to aid humanity: Huidberg describes the extent to which the Israelites developed from Canaanite religion a practice of weeping to appease Yahweh and 'invoke his mercy'.[97] These appeals describe the love and fear of God which is 'the beginning of wisdom': Isaac draws heavily on this antithesis. The Psalmist calls on God as a subject does his monarch, petitioning a hearing. (The invocation is a trope, since the writer does not doubt that he will be granted an audience.) Davril cites a desert anecdote, which uses just this image:

> The man who sits in his cell and who *meditates the psalms* is like a man who seeks the king. But he who *prays without ceasing* is like he who speaks to the king. As for he who *begs with tears*, he seizes the feet of the king and asks for mercy, just as did the courtesan who immediately washed away all her sins with her tears.[98]

Davril reads this as suggesting the superiority of prayer over psalmody, but by ranking psalmody at the base of the hierarchy of spiritual ascent, with penitent tears at the apex, he affirms the importance of psalmody as the daily bread of monastic life. He notes that psalmody chases away *acedia*, which, if present, inhibits mourning, and it is a powerful weapon against the demons.

In some of the psalms, this general mood of supplication becomes more personal and anxious, expressed not just an acknowledgment of God's power, but a longing for God, and in particular for divine forgiveness.[99] Ps 38 explicitly links sorrow for sin and yearning for God: 'I am troubled: I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long' (v. 6) and 'Lord, all my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee' (v. 9). The Psalmist portrays a body racked with disease, bruised and wounded; the senses of sight, hearing and speech failing, a man abandoned by family and friends, who confesses his guilt and repents of his sin. He depends totally on God for help and salvation: 'Make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation' (v. 22). This clearly provides a model for the Christian monk's sense of obedience and humility, which are expressed through grief for sin. Similarly, Psalm 102 graphically describes the physical and emotional disintegration of the penitent, whose 'bones are burned as an hearth', whose heart is 'smitten and withered like grass' (vv. 3, 4

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[97] (1962) 139.

[98] Davril (1987) 107 quotes Moines de Solesmes, 1592, no. 2. This important theme of the tears of the sinful woman is the focus of Section 3.

[99] Ps. 6.6–8.

and 9). His sustenance has become the ashes which accompany the sackcloth of the Ninevite, so starved of human food that his bones cleave to his skin. This recalls the description of monks as being so emaciated by penitent fasting as to barely exist. The juxtaposition of grief and yearning for God is a significant monastic theme, as is the sense of being nourished by weeping. The Christian tradition—especially that articulated in the Syrian world—sometimes refers to tears as the daily bread of monks, and once again there are vivid images of this in the psalms. Psalm 42 asks: 'My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?' and Psalm 80 reads 'Thou feedest them with the bread of tears: and givest them tears to drink in great measure.'[100] Penitent tears are thus seen as sustaining; they are the daily food and drink of the one who repents for sin. The thirsty soul pants for the refreshing waters of God,[101] an image developed in the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus offers the Samaritan woman the living water of God,[102] the all-sufficient bread of life.[103]

Another theme found in the psalms which feeds into the Christian tradition of penitent weeping is the image of the prodigal returning to his father, proleptically articulated in Psalm 39.12: 'Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.' The account of weeping beside the waters of Babylon in Psalm 137 is one of the most quoted in monastic literature, with the question 'How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?' being glossed as the 'strange land' representing that of the passions which distract the penitent from the work of prayer and petition, a metaphorical country shunned also by some of the Greek philosophers.

The emphasis on penitent tears causes psalms of lament to feature heavily in monastic offices. Spiritual fathers urged their disciples to choose especially those readings which prompted grief for sin, and the discipline of learning them by heart rooted such passages in their hearts. But this focus on grief and desolation should not be read as a purely negative experience: the psalms also describe God's mercy

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[100] Ps. 80.5, cf Ps. 102.9: 'For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping.'
[101] Ps. 42.1–2.
[102] John 4.7–15.
[103] John 6.32–35, cf John 7.37–38.

in listening to those who weep. Psalm 6, 8–9, for example, combines both the intense grief of the penitent with a sense of God's mercy:

> I am weary with my groaning; all the night I make my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears. Mine eye is consumed because of grief; it waxeth old because of all mine enemies; Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity, for the Lord hath hears the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer.

Pegon identifies 120 uses of the verb *πενθέω* in the Septuagint. Of these, the references which convey a sense of mourning for sin, rather than human bereavement through physical death, are found predominantly in the psalms, or through references to the penitence of King David, who is frequently cited as an example of one whose sin was great, yet who was forgiven because of his grief for that sin. Aside from the psalms, there are many other references to lamenting and grieving for sin found in the Bible. According to Pegon, Origen was the first to identify in the Bible 'the idea of permanent grief which leads us to consider sin.'[104] In referring to compunction in his *Homily 4 on Isaiah, 3*, Origen also sees *penthos* as a separate concept. He explores this in more detail in his *Homily 20 on Jeremiah*,[105] where he distinguishes between the laughter and the tears which are godly and otherwise by citing the Beatitudes and Luke 6.25, and refers to Psalms 6.7 and 41.3, the benchmark common to monastic writers.

The Hebrew scriptures provide many instances of penitent weeping: turning to the New Testament, there is a shift in emphasis from the general mood of lamentation found in many of the psalms to stories of particular people who wept out of recognition for their sins, and a greater sense of the joyfulness of penitent grief. Peter's lamenting after his denial in the passion narrative and the 'sinful woman' of Luke 7 are the key biblical paradigms, and we have already noted that both Hausherr[106] and Spidlik[107] attribute the Biblical source of the word *penthos* to Matthew 5.4, 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted'.[108] Both Old and New Testament paradigms of penitent grief feed into the subsequent Christian tradition as developed by Patristic commentators.

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[104] Pegon (1952) 1312.
[105] Trans Smith (1998) 233–235.
[106] Hausherr (1982) 7.
[107] Špidlík (1986) 194.
[108] Gregory of Nyssa's *Homilies on the Beatitudes*, PG 44, 1219ff., trans Graef (1954) is a likely starting point for later exponents of the tradition.

The vocabulary and written sources of penthos therefore suggest a complex and ubiquitous concept. Its meaning overlaps with compunction, repentance, yearning and grief. Philosophical ideas about human emotions, the Hebrew scriptures and the prayer and liturgical life of monks throughout the eastern Christian world, all combine to articulate penthos as a godly grief, to be embraced by all who wish to draw closer to God. Whilst expressed by physical tears and groaning, penthos is not selfpitying sadness, nor ritualised or cultic lamentation; it is heartfelt grief at having abandoned God and a yearning to be restored to his presence. It is grief not merely for individual sin but for the fallenness of the human condition. Because it is a grief which yearns for the restoration of something precious, it contains within it the seeds of hope and joy.

Recent Studies of Penthos

Having established what *penthos* is, where it is found within the Christian tradition, and what its roots are, it is useful to look at what modern writers have made of *penthos*, and how they have tackled it as both an intellectual concept and spiritual practice. Given the monastic roots of the tradition of mourning for sin, it is inevitable that many of the commentators themselves write from a Christian perspective, whether lay, ordained or monastic. However, some are far more skilled than others in separating out the spiritual inspiration of *penthos* for the individual from its interest as an anthropological phenomenon which discloses key insights into medieval monastic practices.

Lot-Borodine's *Le mystére du "don des larmes"*[109] was the first major European study of *penthos* in comparatively recent years. Lot-Borodine sought to understand the nature of this 'mystery', and her findings formed the basis of much of the further study of the subject in the twentieth century. The substance of her argument is uncontroversial, and is thoroughly substantiated by patristic citation from both the Latin and Greek traditions, as well as by reference to contemporary scholarship, above all Hausherr, whose interest in the matter clearly predated his monograph of 1944.[110] Lot-Borodine draws on an existing

[109] 1936. This was reprinted as 'La douloureuse joie' in *Spiritualité Oriéntale* 14 (1974).

[110] His edition of the *Vita* of Symeon the New Theologian provides the most frequent source of references to *penthos*; however he does refer to the subject in other early works, such as 'La méthode d'oraison hésychaste'.

interpretation of the three-stage progress towards God (purgation, illumination, perfection) suggested by Dionysius and Evagrios:[111] this straddling of east and west is typical of much of the earlier background material on *penthos*, although eastern Christian theologians are increasingly taking an interest in the matter.

She makes four main points: firstly, that compunction of tears is 'native to ancient Christianity,'[112] and by the end of the 4th century what had originally been seen as a charism, graciously granted to a spiritual elite, becomes 'the norm,'[113] a benchmark by which monastic virtue was measured. Secondly, she suggests that the gift of tears is never despairing, because it stems not from the frustration of earthly passions but from the dissatisfaction of spiritual desires.[114] She demonstrates this by reference to Klimakos, who emphasised the 'joy-bearing nature' of spiritual tears, and the distinction has already been drawn between secular grief 'according to man' and that which is godly in nature and origin. Thirdly, she finds that tears accompany prayer because both are rooted in humility; they are therefore an essential part of contemplation. The penitent's first prayer should be for tears, an idea already noted to have come from Evagrios.[115] Lastly, she focuses on the concept of tears as a second baptism, following the teachings on this by John of Damascus which were subsequently developed by Symeon the New Theologian. Of these key issues the first and third reflect the predominantly monastic focus of much writing on tears; she has little to add to Symeon's own views on *penthos* as second baptism.

Gillet responded to her article the following year, 1937,[116] and (from his perspective as a convert to eastern Christianity) criticised her acceptance of the Dionysian threefold 'schematism' of the way to perfection,[117] revealing the customary Orthodox dislike of what he sees as the Western concern for categorization. Where Lot-Borodine had described the way of tears in terms of a 'thrilling shortcut',[118] in terms which suggest it is a cul de sac, he asserts that on the con-

[111] (1936) 70–71.
[112] (1936) 76.
[113] (1936) 87.
[114] (1936) 87.
[115] Evagrios, *Chapters on prayer* no. 5, PG 79, trans Bamberger (1981) 56.
[116] (1937) 5–10.
[117] (1937) 10.
[118] (1936) 110.

trary it is 'no by-way . . . but a high road which leads to the very heart of Orthodoxy.'[119] So for Gillet, *penthos* is fundamental, not peripheral, to Christian experience. With regard to the issue of tears as second baptism, Gillet emphasizes again an Orthodox perspective, pointing out that monastic profession was also ratified as a type of baptism,[120] adding weight to the understanding of monastic life being based on *penthos*. He affirms the need for a fuller study of the subject, both in this article and in his book, *Orthodox Spirituality*.[121] In both instances, he invokes the example of Mary Magdalene as a practitioner of the gift of tears, and here he employs the conventional conflation of Biblical narratives which will be explored in the analysis of homilies on the 'sinful woman'.

Hausherr: the Jesuit Perspective

Useful those both these writers are, they are eclipsed by the work of the Jesuit priest and scholar Irénée Hausherr, who had touched on the issue of *penthos* in other writings before he wrote his full-length work *Penthos: la Doctrine de Componction dans l'Oriént Chrétien*.[122] This book has been acclaimed as the magisterial study, and its significance is enduring. The catalogue of patristic references to *penthos* in it is provides a potentially valuable reference point for the collation of primary material, however, this potential can rarely be realised properly, because of the absence of full footnoting and bibliographical data. Hausherr's study, despite its merits, has serious shortcomings, both in terms of methodology and perspective.

Hausherr presents his reader with a vast patristic florilegium, the breadth of which provides ample evidence of the centrality of *penthos* in eastern Christian thought from its earliest expression up to the time of Nicodemus the Hagiorite in the eighteenth century. The Fathers cited come from Sinai, Egypt, Syria and Palestine. The first four chapters give a useful overview of his understanding of the meaning of the term. He provides the first analysis of the lexicography of the word, an invaluable starting point for determining the development

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[119] (1937) 10.
[120] (1945) 47, cites the 5th Novella of the Emperor Justinian.
[121] (1945) 47.
[122] OCA 132, Rome (1944), trans Haufstader (1982). Henceforth this will be referred to as Hausherr (1982).

of the term in its Christian context. He gives a much fuller definition of the term than that offered by Lot-Borodine, and elaborates on the closeness in meaning between *penthos* and *katanuxis*, an element which is barely mentioned by his predecessors. Hausherr has therefore laid secure foundations for future exploration of the meaning of the term in specific, rather than general, contexts. The fifth to seventh chapters consider the causes of compunction, the means to it and obstacles preventing it. To approach the subject as potential for a scientific analysis of 'before and after' is questionable, since this is not, by and large, how the authors themselves handle the material. The conciseness of the introductory chapters has been lost by this point. As a result of this, and the flawed and archaic methodology, it becomes increasingly difficult to locate Hausherr's line of argument within a plethora of patristic proof texts. The final three Chapters, which consider two 'effects of penthos' and sum up his findings, are equally problematic, for the same reason that they do not approach their sources with sufficient sensitivity to the writers' own intentions and cultural-theological situation. There is no index, and the bibliography consists merely of two pages of abbreviations, which are not adequately explained.

All this presents considerable problems to the modern reader: even Hausherr's anonymous translator acknowledges the first serious flaw in his work; namely, the cavalier attitude to scholarly apparatus.[123] An example of this is in Chapter III, where he tells us airily: 'After Origen came a swarm of quite orthodox writers endlessly preaching the necessity and usefulness of *penthos*'.[124] He lists twenty-five of them over the next page, but gives relevant titles for only six of them, and no further bibliographical clues. The length of quotations (up to two and a half pages of unbroken citation), and the proportion of citation to comment is also problematic: in Chapter V, slightly more than fifty percent of the lines are quotation.[125] This severely interrupts the flow of his narrative. The juxtaposition of ancient and contemporary styles of writing is also confusing, and detracts from his argument. As a result, Chapter V reads more like an anthology than an analytical appraisal. This impression is deepened by Hausherr's own admission of somewhat arbitrary method; he chooses texts which

[123] Hausherr (1982) iii.
[124] Hausherr (1982) 14.
[125] 563 lines out of a total of 936 lines.

are 'taken at random, from the mass of those which come to mind'.[126]

A related problem is the failure to deliver his material in the order outlined at the start of a chapter, without digression or backtracking. For example, Chapter VII, on 'Obstacles to *Penthos*', states as its intention an examination of three particular areas. Almost immediately, however, Hausherr moves into an exploration of the incompatibility of evil *logismoi* with *penthos*, a diversion which includes some nine pages on laughter. While abounding with fine texts, this bears no relation to the topic he had said he would address, which was 'neglect of the prescribed exercises: examination of conscience, meditation on the last things, manifestation of conscience'.[127] This method conceals, rather than reveals, the line of his argument, just as the volume of citation in the preceding chapter on the causes of compunction does. The two chapters read as a diffuse typikon, in which citations from the individual Fathers are juxtaposed, expounding somewhat unrelated ideas, taken totally out of context. The reluctance to place texts in their context is a problem not just of methodology but also of theological perspective. Nowhere does Hausherr give a verbal map to the provenance and date of his sources, nor the particular background within which each was writing. Given the breadth of material already noted, this makes it difficult for his reader to appreciate the subtle distinctions of audience and idiom pertaining to each author.

Hausherr also allows his eagerness for the subject to find expression in what some may find to be an obtrusively personal manner: an example is 'Anyone whose critical temper is not completely removed by this amazing account must be content with lesser stuff'.[128] His enthusiasm is engaging, but its expression in a book so loaded with frustrations for the scholar becomes irritating, and diminishes his credibility.

The second main flaw in Hausherr's study is demonstrated by the table of contents. Hausherr seeks to identify the causes and effects of *penthos*, how to obtain it and what might prevent it. This suggests that he sees, or seeks, a scholastic logical progression from one category of Christian life to another, with a systematic division of the material and the experiences it describes. He expresses these distinctions in terms of a chronological sequence of events: 'Weeping first—that

[126] Hausherr (1982) 36.
[127] Hausherr (1982) 88.
[128] (1982) 156.

is a must. Mysticism afterwards, if it is God's will.'[129] Of course, Klimakos places *penthos* on a 'ladder', but he does not divorce it from other spiritual experiences; rather he suggests a coinherence of practice, experience and grace. Some patristic sources suggest that one spiritual state precedes another, (and the dominant motif of hierarchies in, for example, Dionysius is significant) but in general *penthos* is not described as belonging only to one stage of spiritual life. Symeon, for example, sees weeping as appropriate to all stages of spiritual advancement. Hausherr's scholastic perspective, which is at odds to the eastern Christian sensitivities, is best illustrated by examining his attitude to mysticism, on which his argument hinges.

Hausherr takes issue with Lot-Borodine and Dom Steidle[130] for believing the 'problem' of *penthos* to be one of mystical perception. He asserts that there is a problem, 'but it is not primarily mystical. It is first of all a problem of faith'.[131] Towards the end of the epilogue, he returns to this idea, apparently contradicting his earlier comment: 'Finally, the 'gift of tears' does pose a problem of mysticism'. He dispenses with a discussion of Symeon the New Theologian's claim that tears of compunction are evidence of grace, saying:

> This is for theorists to show. We will have done our job if we can show that the penthos preached by the Fathers is not essentially mystical, but that it springs initially from ascesis.[132]

Hausherr seems here to be drawing on distinctions between mysticism, faith and ascesis which stem not from the texts he cites, but are an eisegesis from Catholic scholastic categories. He demonstrates his saturation in the Roman tradition represented by *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* which states, for example:

> Ascetics, as a branch of theology, may be briefly defined as the scientific exposition of Christian mysticism . . . Ascetical theology . . . has been separated from moral theology and mysticism . . . [which] includes also matters of ascetics.[133]

Hausherr's reading of his patristic sources is through the lens of such western scholasticism. This shapes his methodology, for in seeking to prove that *penthos* is not mystical but ascetic at root, Hausherr applies

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[129] Hausherr (1982) 175.
[130] 1938.
[131] Hausherr (1982) 160.
[132] Hausherr (1982) 175.
[133] Poulain (1912) vol. 14, 613–22.

criteria which ignore the eastern Christian understanding of the indivisibility of theological experiences and their theological expression. Whilst distinctions need to be drawn between, say, monastic typika, homilies, and sentences as being different literary idioms, written for different audiences and occasions, they do not themselves break down into simple distinctions between moral, ascetic, mystical or any other sort of theology. They all emphasise the eastern Christian concept that theology is lived; it is a continuing process of Spirit-filled prayer and spiritual labours, indistinguishable from a theory about such experiences. Despite his great breadth of knowledge about the subject, Hausherr lacks a sensitivity for the complexity and holistic nature of eastern Christian theology. Ware, writing from within that tradition, expresses this variety of perspective well. His description of tradition, given in the introduction, is followed by a comment on the conciliar and patristic nature of tradition that he acknowledges:

> To one accustomed to the principles of Scholastic reasoning, [this] may seem an emotional and sentimental way of arguing. To an Orthodox, on the other hand, it is precisely the experience of the saints that constitutes the final criterion in theology.[134]

Ware's analysis of the inappropriateness of applying scholastic reasoning to a living tradition could stand as a critique of Hausherr's perspective. He observes that the rise of scholasticism shifted theology 'from the cloister to the lecture room.'[135]

Stephen Thomas, in an article on 'Conscience in Orthodox Thought' reiterates this concern with the scholastic perspective of Hausherr. Thomas is particularly concerned at Hausherr's desire to separate *lype, penthos* and *metanoia*, not because they do not have separate meanings, but because the concepts are inter-related. He states:

> Fr Hausherr's tendency to want to establish inappropriately crystalline conceptual distinctions, has led to a filtering out of the richness and nuanced quality of philocalic psychology. *Lype* is the Pauline word for what ascetics called both *lype* and *penthos*.[136]

Thomas' reservations about Hausherr's style steer us towards a more apposite approach in which the primary sources are located firmly within their context, and allowed their native expression, rather than an imposed ideology. Interestingly, the two other chief commentators

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[134] Ware (1973) 20.
[135] Ware (1973) 19.
[136] (2000) 12.

on *penthos* both demonstrate precisely the right sensitivity to nuances, in that they both focus on the relationship between *penthos* and repentance by acknowledging the overlap in patristic useage of both terms.

Ware and Chryssavgis: an Eastern Christian Corrective

Apart from Lev Gillet's book (already referred to) it was not until Kallistos Ware's popular exposition of the eastern Christian Tradition in 1979, nearly thirty years after Hausherr's monograph, that the subject received further attention by scholars. *Penthos* is clearly of interest to Ware, and where he mentions the subject, he does so with sensitivity for the patristic understanding of its role in moving the Christian soul towards a restoration of the image of God.[137] Like John Chryssavgis, he writes as an ordained orthodox who is also an active academic and writer. Ware appropriately places his discussion of 'the gift of tears' in the context of the sacrament of reconciliation.[138] He asks the question 'What has this gift of tears to teach us about the meaning of repentance?'[139] He defines repentance as being:

> normally regarded as sorrow for sin, a feeling of guilt, a sense of grief and horror at the wounds we have inflicted on others and ourselves

which is allied to a change of mind (his interpretation of *metanoia*).[140] He then categorises tears as of two main types,[141] sensual and spiritual, and—perhaps following Klimakos' lead—further subdivides the spiritual tears into bitter and sweet.[142]

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[137] This is a prevailing concern for Ware, and permeates even his earliest academic study, such as his doctoral research on *The Ascetic Writings of Mark the Hermit*, DPhil, Oxford (1965).

[138] 1980. This article reiterates the points made on the subject in *The Orthodox Way*, (1979) 5.

[139] (1980) 27.

[140] (1980) 19.

[141] The third, demonic, is mentioned parenthetically, and not developed.

[142] Ware provides a set of distinctions between the two, which may be expressed as follows:

Bitter	*Sweet*
lower level	higher level
form of purification	form of illumination
expressing contrition for sin	expressing joy at reconciliation
exemplified by the prodigal still in exile	exemplified by the prodigal welcomed home
like 'blood from the wounds of the soul'	a transfiguring spiritualizing of the senses

Ware raises, and does not entirely answer, various questions: do the tears *constitute* repentance? Are they *proof* of repentance, or an optional form of *expression* of it? His final comments on repentance resonate with Klimakos' description of *penthos* as being grace-bearing and joyful:

> And so, in this gift of tears, we see illustrated yet again the point on which we have constantly insisted: that repentance is not negative but positive, not destructive but lifegiving, not despondent but full of hope.[143]

Chryssavgis, in both his full-length study[144] and a shorter article,[145] likewise considers the question of *penthos* and tears in the context of repentance and sacramental confession. In the former, he cites the liturgical 'service of the penitents', which mentions several of the penitent biblical figures who recur in patristic exegesis:

> O God, who did forgive David the sins which he confessed . . . and Peter the denial he bitterly bewailed, and the sinful woman who wept at Your feet, and the publican, and the prodigal son: may the same God forgive you all through me a sinner.[146]

He also cites many relevant patristic sources, but his own comment on the subject is more cogently expressed in the article than the monograph. Much of the article is devoted to defending the position of eastern Christian thought against that of the West, and the concept of Adam's fall from grace as 'original sin'. He describes:

> The whole of the Christian life (as) a repentance (the Greek word 'meta-noia' implies reorientation and redirection) from death to life, from sin to grace.[147]

Like Ware, Chryssavgis reserves comment on 'the gift of tears' for his concluding section. He quotes the Chevalier de Barizel legend, which Lot-Borodine and Gillet also use,[148] and makes two significant

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[143] (1979) 26, 7.
[144] 1990.
[145] 1994.
[146] (1990) 99. The same penitent figures from the Bible are found in Evagrios' exhortation to tears, quoted by Gillet (1937) 8.
[147] (1994) 81.
[148] The legend tells of a knight 'who had been charged, as a penance for his sins, to fill a small barrel with water. He wandered over the whole earth, plunging his barrel into all waters, and still not a drop would penetrate within; until one day he shed a tear of genuine repentance, and in a moment, the barrel filled with water to the brim.' Cited in Gillet (1937) 5.

points. Firstly, he argues that tears mark the frontier between the past life of sin and the future life of grace. They are thus an eschatological marker, an example of the age to come realized in the present.[149] In corroboration of this, he cites Symeon the New Theologian's comment that tears are 'a manifest sign of the sanctifying grace that deifies the entire human person, body and soul'.[150] However, Isaac's concept of the truly illuminated person taking leave of tears also resonates here. Secondly, he perceives that tears are 'real and sentient'[151] and denote that God, not human will, is in control. In allowing God to act through the penitent he or she breaks down the barriers to communion with God.

So Chryssavgis develops a more sophisticated analysis of the theology of penitent tears than Ware, who gives a categorisation of the types of tears (firmly substantiated by patristic citation) and their growth from various emotions (a subtext he explores elsewhere in various considerations of the role of the emotions in Christian life). Chryssavgis goes further, to make two important theological points: first, the eschatological significance of tears, and second, their function as demonstrating the Christian's submission to the authority and healing power of God. While both Ware and Chryssavgis speak of metanoia in terms of a change of direction, Chryssavgis expresses more clearly the dynamism of the process of metanoia, in doctrinal terms.

Maggie Ross uses another theological term to describe this sense of submission to God: she talks of kenosis and the eschatological subtext of *penthos*. Her book, *The Fountain and the Furnace*,[152] is a broad-ranging discussion on the connection between tears and fire, with substantial amounts of citation from Isaac the Syrian and Ephrem. In both this full-length study and her article of the same year,[153] Ross is concerned to understand the christological aspect of *penthos*. She sees tears as a 'kenotic exchange',[154] in which a relinquishing of power to God enables one to experience redemption through divine participation in human suffering. (This theme is taken up by Panicker,[155]

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[149] Chryssavgis appropriately cites Klimakos here: tears are 'a resurrection before the Resurrection' (*Ladder 14*, 24; PG 88, 868 and 26, 16; PG 88, 1020).
[150] *Cat 28*, quoted in (1994) 91.
[151] (1994) 91.
[152] 1987(ii).
[153] (1987(i)), vol. 9, no. 2, 14–23.
[154] (1987(i)) 18.
[155] (1991) 125–6.

who reiterates comments already cited on the connection between tears and repentance.) An Anglican hermit, Ross shows sensitivity to the eastern Christian view of *penthos* as a process of 'organic transformation of the person',[156] in other words the tears are tangible and also spiritually transfiguring. In this process she identifies penitent tears as crucial to Christian experience, for they effect a kenosis of pseudo-life which makes room for real life in God. Her use of the technical term 'kenosis' both emphasises the Christological significance of mourning for sin, and points out the kenosis which takes place in true humility, which is often described, especially in the Syrian tradition, as the precursor of *penthos*. For Ross, questions about the nature of reality and illusion are raised by the process of compunction. She describes it as 'that piercing light that is katanyxis, the painful shock that shows us the illusory nature of our perceptions about our selves'.[157]

Like Chryssavgis, she identifies divine power in this process, and goes even further, describing the tears as not only indicating the work of the Holy Spirit in a person who has submitted themself to God, but indicative also of that very willingness to be transformed. Tears therefore demonstrate the process and the outcome of *penthos*. Ross here reveals an understanding of the eschatological nature of *penthos* which is not found in Hausherr's division into causes and effects of the subject. This awareness of the conjunction of earthly and heavenly time is developed in her description of tears as resulting from polarity, which is at its most evident with the 'coming of the person into sacred time which is interpenetrated with and becoming the 'ordinary'.[158] Tears are not despairing, but joyful, because passing through a period of despondency highlights the presence of God within that darkness, and so the mourner arrives at 'the timeless moment where creation and parousia intersect'.[159] Ross' synthesis of religious terminology and desert-type psychological sensitivity give great credibility to her insights. Although not herself an Orthodox Christian, she is clearly more in touch with their perspective than the Jesuit Hausherr, and this is particularly evident in her awareness of the indivisibility of theory and praxis in *penthos*.

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[156] (1987(i)) 14.
[157] (1987(i)) 16.
[158] (1987(i)) 20.
[159] (1987(i)) 21.

Driscoll's Suggestion for a Patristic Exegetical Methodology

Hausherr apparently responded to Gillet's suggestion of the need for a fuller study of the gift of tears, but produced only a rudimentary basis for further exploration. Driscoll, towards the end of the twentieth century, picked up the baton, focusing on Evagrios.[160] He both affirmed Hausherr's contribution to the corpus of knowledge, and suggested the need for a re-evaluation. His work on Evagrius Ponticus identifies two aspects of *penthos* and tears that are found in other exponents of the tradition, namely that tears are found especially at the start of the spiritual pilgrimage,[161] and also that tears and penthos are closely related to *acedia*. (This connection is made by Hausherr, who denotes *acedia* 'the direct opposite of *penthos*'.)[162] Driscoll makes no overt criticism of Hausherr's scholastic perspective, though (uniquely among modern commentators on the subject) he takes issue with the methodology employed by his venerable Jesuit predecessor. He excuses a certain amount on the grounds that patristic methodology 'has been considerably refined in the last decades,' but criticizes Hausherr for giving his reader what he terms 'a global sense of the subject' caused by citing 'all at once authors from various epochs and different traditions.'[163] He proposes refining this by drawing instead on:

> a series of individual studies on the various masters whom Hausherr so widely cites. With a more systematic understanding of the teaching of these different masters on penthos, someone might be able with greater security to attempt again Hausherr's more thematic and global approach, perhaps giving the study a stronger chronological organization, an organization that also recognizes and articulates the different strands of a developing tradition.[164]

Driscoll illustrates this brilliantly in his methodical appraisal of seven of Evagrios' chapters on prayer. He explores his chosen text in far more detail than Hausherr does any of his multitude of texts. Driscoll identifies the need to place the texts cited in their context, locating them within the tradition as a whole, and connecting them to other

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[160] 1994.

[161] Driscoll aptly comments, however, that 'as is typical for Evagrius, whatever concerns the beginning is also related by him to the end' (1994) 148. He, like Ross, is sensitive to the eschatological nature of tears.

[162] (1982) 5.

[163] (1994) 147.

[164] (1994) 148.

relevant texts. Also, he argues that the material would benefit from ordering in such a way as to acknowledge both the chronology, and the geographical place within the tradition to which the text belongs. As already noted, there is much more about Evagrios that could be said, but four main writers provides more than enough material for a study of *penthos*. At this juncture, Driscoll's chief contribution is in the methodology he suggests and demonstrates. As Driscoll has pointed out, Hausherr does not place his references within their context. To understand the texts it is essential to learn for whom they were written, when and where. Some biographical evidence is therefore given for each of the four writers examined here, although this varies enormously according to what is reliably known about the person concerned. Also, some sense of the particular monastic context will be given. Klimakos writes as an abbot in Sinai; Ephrem as a deacon in Syria, and these differences shape the genre of their texts, the language in which they are written and their reception.

Driscoll also flags up the need to avoid another Hausherrian problem, namely his desire to separate the theology within the texts into different categories. The texts themselves fall naturally (or with some editorial persuasion) into discrete sections, and the titles of the texts or their subsections indicate separate themes or emphases which reflect the particular occasion of the preaching of that one homily. These must be respected, and often provide a matrix for exegesis. There is also the tradition, for example in the *Apophthegmata*, of collating particular texts together, anthologising material. This is a different type of ordering, however, to what Hausherr seems to want to do. All of these texts belong to the eastern Christian theological field, and share an underlying conviction that theology cannot be theoretical; it is practical, lived out and tested in human existence which in the case of monks is rooted in a living relationship with God. It is, therefore, inimical to the texts and their tradition to talk too definitively of being either 'mystical' or 'a matter of faith', as Hausherr does. This just is not how the patristic writers themselves would have seen it. Here one needs to sails a route between a Scylla and Charybdis! Exegetical comment must be structured and ordered, and it is hoped that this study does so, with adequate sensitivity to the native qualities of the texts themselves.

SECTION II

THE CALL TO REPENTANCE FROM THE DESERT

CHAPTER ONE

THE DESERT TRADITION

By commencing his 'good news' with a messenger from the desert, the Evangelist Mark places before his reader a seminal figure for Christian monasticism: John the Forerunner, cousin of Christ himself. From its very inception, Christian belief and asceticism thus owed important insights to the concept and experience of the desert. In the desert, the penitent has space and solitude to lament his or her sins, and to seek a closer relationship with God than the distractions and demands of the world permits.

Much scholarly work chronicles the history and location of the monks who exiled themselves in desert regions of various types, and explores their concerns and writings, both through editions of the ancient works, and appraisal of them.[1] Reiteration of these studies being superfluous, two issues furnish sufficient background to Klimakos' treatment of *penthos*: firstly, what was the nature of the desert experience, and, secondly, what part did *penthos* play in desert monasticism?

Generic phrases such as 'the desert' are seductive and dangerous, because they risk glossing over the distinctiveness of particular manifestations within a wider tradition. However, the term has long been adopted by scholars and faithful because it provides a peg on which to hang many significant experiences, common both to hermits and community-dwelling monks, in several different countries and many

[1] An important starting point for the study of Egyptian and Palestinian monasticism is D.J. Chitty, *The Desert a City* (1966). R.M. Price, *Cyril of Scythopolis: the lives of the monks of Palestine* (1991), provides a useful introduction, and for the Egyptian Fathers, see B. Ward's keenly focused introduction to N. Russell's translation *The Lives of the Desert Fathers* (1981), as well as her edition of *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers* (1975), and *Harlots of the Desert* (1987). C. Stewart has translated the anonymous sayings in *The World of the Desert Fathers* (1986), and H. Waddell (1936) provides an anthology of texts. Note also Chapter 3 of A. Louth's *The Wilderness of God* (1991). The 4 extant volumes in English translation of *The Philokalia* (1979ff.) contain many ancient authors from the desert tradition. See also J. Binns, *Ascetics and Ambassadors of Christ* (1994), for an account of Palestinian monasticism, D. Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert* (1993), G. Gould, *The Desert Fathers on Monastic Community* (1993). Eds. V.L. Wimbush/R. Valantasis, *Asceticism* (1995) is a mine of fascinating articles on many areas on monasticism.

centuries.[2] 'Deserts' of the monastic sort were found throughout the Mediterranean and Middle East, starting with the wilderness exiles of Old Testament prophets and continuing through history to the modern urban 'deserts' of physical and metaphorical alienation and solitude. The concept of a 'desert life' is rooted in the Bible, as Louth attests.[3] The desert exemplified the concept of *metanoia.* Entering the desert means reprioritising one's life, in response to the divine command which John the Forerunner articulated. His call to repentance, echoing that of the prophets and psalmist, is accompanied by a sense of the imminence of the day of judgment. Frequently in the Biblical texts John's name appears in conjunction with images of pruning and destroying the unfruitful parts of a plant, the casting into eternal fire of errant growths. The solitude and barrenness of the desert, be it rocky, sandy, watery or even urban, encourages the undistracted contemplation of self and God. To be alone with God is to be aware of the distance between human individuals and God, and this movement of *metanoia* within the heart accompanies the physical movement to the desert. Binns perceives this sense of movement as the very root of desert spirituality, a movement which is 'mirrored in the interior life of the soul as the saint becomes closer to God'.[4] The desire to restore mankind to its original closeness with God is accompanied by grief at its having lost that intimacy. The very exercise of spiritual grief effects the restoration of the penitent.

So the desert is experienced by each individual who, physically and spiritually, removes him or herself from the world in order to focus on God. It is important to remember that mere physical escape from the world did not in itself constitute desert monasticism. Contemporary evidence, cited by Rubenson[5] and Ward,[6] suggests that some people became monks in order to avoid such worldly banes as paying taxes, military service, domestic responsibilities or legal punishments. But the theological idea of desert is different. As Merton points out: 'The flight to the desert is not escapist, individualistic or negative; it is in order to seek God.'[7]

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[2] See Binns (1994) especially 79–99.
[3] See Louth (1991) 29, 31 for a discussion of the Biblical understanding of desert.
[4] Binns (1994) 239.
[5] (1990) 92ff.
[6] (1975) 15.
[7] (1960) 4–5.

The repentance of the desert monk is his most active work. It is 'a contract with God for a second life'[8] according to Klimakos. Through it, he takes responsibility for the exercise of his free will, the working out of his divinely given humanity. Repentance is more than the passive virtues of fasting or chastity (the avoidance of evil), and is not identical with the disciplined exercise of obedience (acquiring the habit of self-renunciation and humility), though all these qualities are key aspects of desert life, as Klimakos himself asserts, according obedience some thirty pages in his treatise, and chastity fifteen pages. He explains the great importance of obedience as being rooted in humility and the death of one's own will, and describes fasting and obedience as 'the two virtues of the active life'.[9] Obedience is also essential within the paradigm of the spiritual direction which is quintessential of the desert experience, a charism for which Klimakos himself was noted. Monastic repentance constitutes a return to the true self, putting aside the sinfulness to which humanity is prone and which corrupts the image of God. Repentance restores sinners both to God, and themselves, a returning home which constitutes a rebirth akin to that of the Prodigal Son, who 'was dead, and is alive again'.[10] It constitutes the recognition of self as sinner, deeply loved by God.[11]

The desert dweller does not undergo *metanoia* in isolation. The flight to the desert has at its heart human relationships, primarily, those between the individual and God and the individual with him/herself. The physical journey may give way to an interiorized one, as acknowleged by the common *Apophthegma* to stay in your cell, for your cell will teach you everything. But both hermit and coenobite are responsible for sharing the wisdom gained from their spiritual journey with others, indeed, this transmission of spiritual wisdom from one generation to another is axiomatic of desert monasticism.[12] Even the most solitary and single-minded monk lives under the second of the great commandments, because, as Klimakos reminds us: 'He who loves the Lord has first loved his brother, because the second is a proof of the first.'[13]

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[8] All references to *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* refer to PG 88 (1864). References will be given by column number only, with the English translation by Moore being denoted by 'Moore (1959)' and page number. *Step 5*, 1, 764B, Moore (1959) 98.

[9] *Step 26*, 73, 1029A, Moore (1959) 212.

[10] Luke 15.24.

[11] This insight is explored especially by trans Ward (1975) 13 and Dorries (1962) 300.

[12] Louf in Sommerfeldt, ed (1982) 37.

[13] *Step 30*, 25, 1157D, Moore (1959) 264.

The giving of a saving word was the prime example of such charity, although the monks' healing miracles, deeds of charity and fights with demons are also recorded, as proofs of their holiness and spiritual power, as well as providing some very human insights and humour.

The transmission of desert wisdom is a process of externalisation, in which the inner life is articulated by deeds or words. The process starts with each individual's internal encounter with God. This is fleshed out by the monk's interiorised knowledge of Holy Scripture, the daily food of monastic spirituality, which is cited and referred to as the corroboration of any insight offered by one person to another.[14] The spiritual insights may be shared with disciples, pilgrims, other monks through oral transmission, as recorded by the *Apophthegmata*. They may also be recorded more formally in writing as typika for the use of the Higoumen,[15] or take the form of letters between spiritual father and son.[16] The physical movement of the individual into the desert, and the spiritual journey with God, into the heart, is always followed by a giving out to other people.

In addition to comparing the progress of the desert experience as that of the prodigal son,[17] modern commentators have also described it as *xenitea*, the process of exile and loss which reflect the self-emptying and pilgrim life of Christ.[18] Both these concepts suggest powerfully the profoundly Biblical underpinning of life in the desert. However, McGuckin's caveat that 'Xeniteia is largely rhetorical in its origin . . . obviously a Greco-Roman political concept' is pertinent here. He notes that the concept:

> never assumed the mantle of a developed biblicism in any of the possible routes it could have taken towards such a stature in Christian rhetorical use.[19]

With this background understanding of the nature of the desert tradition, it is now possible to consider the place of *penthos* within the literature, in which it constitutes and articulates many aspects of the

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[14] Dawes and Baynes (1948), ix, and see also Burton-Christie (1993), for an excellent, indepth study of the role of scripture in the life of the desert.

[15] For example, the *Typikon* of Athanasius the Athonite, to be found in Thomas and Hero (2000), and Basil's *Rules*.

[16] An important example is the correspondence between Barsanuphius and John. A selection of this has been translated by Chryssavgis (2003), with a fuller edition due out in the Cistercian Studies Series, by the same translator, in 2004/5.

[17] This theme is explored by Ward, in trans Russell (1981) 33.

[18] George (1994) 46–51.

[19] In Smythe (2000).

desert experience. Sister Sylvia Mary demonstrates this, when she lists as possible sources of a 'theology of tears' the writings of 'Evagrios, Isaias of Scete, pseudo-Macarius, John Cassian and John Climacos':[20] in other words, *penthos* is fundamentally a monastic, desert practice. *Penthos* defines the role and nature of the monk, provokes the initial flight from the world, accompanies and expresses the work of repentance, heightens an awareness of the imminence of death and judgement, benefits others by inspiring them and empathising with them in their sins and leads to freedom, consolation and grace.

The primary sources state that the monk is one who mourns for sin. Klimakos says that: 'A monk is a mourning soul, that both asleep and awake is unceasingly occupied with the remembrance of death.'[21] Athanasius the Athonite, commending the inner martyrdom of the monastic life, tells his monks: 'We were called to mourning (*penthos*) not to rejoicing.'[22] The ability to weep is seen as a measure of holiness.[23] Writing from a different monastic context, Paul of Evergetinos recommends that the giving of a 'word' be accompanied by compunction and sincere tears.[24] In some cases the advice that was given was to ask for compunction and tears.[25] Evagrios prioritises *penthos* in his *Chapters on Prayer*, advising 'Pray first for the gift of tears, so that by that means of sorrow you may soften your native rudeness.'[26] Lamenting and mourning for sin was the very work of the monk, his reason for *anachoresis*, and the wisdom he acquired and then shared. *Penthos* is 'the meaning of monastic life'[27] and 'a monk's constant occupation'.[28] Mourning is not simply for individual sin, but for that of others, and for the fallen state of the world. The desert praxis of *penthos* is not a selfish or individualistic one.

As well as being the chief occupation of the monk, *penthos* is often the catalyst for the initial flight to the desert. Cyril of Scythopolis describes how John the hesychast, on entering the busy hospice of St. George,

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[20] (1970) 431.
[21] *Step 1*, 4, 633C, Moore (1959) 50.
[22] *Typikon*, 111, 34.
[23] Baynes (1947) 404–14, states that 'the model bishop is generous in almsgiving, he does not cherish the memory of injuries, he possesses the gift of tears and has great sympathy with sinners.'
[24] Evergetinos 4. 38. 7. 6, N 433, quoted by Gould (1993) 75.
[25] Abba Matoes, 11, trans Ward (1975) 145.
[26] Trans Bamberger (1981) 56.
[27] Gale (1985) 29.
[28] Gould (1993) 129.

> finding there the hubbub of the world . . . was grieved in spirit and begged God with tears to be led to some pleasant and solitary spot conducive to salvation.[29]

In addition to this reactive response to the affairs of the world, there is also what may be termed a proactive response: *penthos* provokes a psychological and spiritual process of remorse which Barsanuphius describes as: 'now one pricks me from within to awaken the Helmsman'.[30] Cassian refers to 'the thorns of conscience'[31] and 'the pricks of our sins'[32] which promote awareness of the need to withdraw to the desert. As mentioned in the introduction, *katanuxis* and *penthos* are distinct but may also be symbiotic conditions. The sense of contrition and remorse are accompanied by grief for sins of self and others, and mourning for the erosion of focus and direction by sin. The physical pain suggested by thorns and spurs (the image Klimakos himself uses) expresses the inner pain of the grieving heart. According to Abba Isaiah, the flight from the world of men is constituted by sitting alone in your cell, weeping for your sins.[33] In other words, the very *process* of flight from the world, when it results in the ascetic life, constitutes godly grief.

So the experience of *penthos* leads the penitent into desert. There, by expressing the repentance which mends humanity's relationship with God, it may be, paradoxically, a joyful as well as penitent experience. Klimakos expresses this complicated conjunction of emotions well, advising that one should:

> Keep a firm hold of the blessed joy-grief of holy compunction, and do not stop working at it until it raises you high above the things of this world and presents you pure to Christ.[34]

John of Ephesus records an example of this in the case of Abraham the Presbyter. A man who asks to be admitted into a monastery:

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[29] Trans Price (1991) 223.

[30] *Letter LXI*, trans Chitty (1966) 523.

[31] *Conference XX*, VII, PL 49, 1156ff., trans Gibson (1995) 499.

[32] *Conference IX*, XXIX, PL 49, 804ff., trans Gibson (1995) 397. Klimakos' debt to Cassian is stressed by Archimandrite Sophrony in "Des trois renoncements monastiques", *Studia Patristica* vol. V, III, (1962) 393–400. Although he does not specifically mention *penthos* in this article, he provides convincing evidence of Klimakos' participation in the desert tradition as espoused by Cassian.

[33] Macarius 27, Ward (1975) 133.

[34] *Step 7*, 9, 804C, Moore (1959) 114. Cf. Isaiah the Solitary, Or. XXVI, PG 40, 1193, trans "On guarding the intellect" no. 17, *Philokalia*, vol. 1, 25.

> having cast himself upon his face and weeping, continued swearing to us: "I have no concern in this world, except to repent for my sins, and if I may be admitted to the monastic habit, that in it I may serve and please God during this remnant of life".[35]

In the case of St. Sabas, the saint is struck by compunction at the gratitude of some pagans for hospitality received, which made him aware of his comparative ingratitude to God.[36] In Klimakos' chapter on repentance the graphic description of the prison of the penitents is found, people who: 'loudly lamented over their souls as over the dead',[37] the prison being as much a metaphor for the stricken conscience as a physical place. To some extent, as Ware has suggested, mourning and repentance are synonymous.

A significant impetus to mourning is a consciousness of the ephemerality of human existence, and the recognition of the fate that awaits each person after their death. Burton-Christie describes how *penthos* derives from such awareness:

> The consciousness of the reality of judgment and of the nearness of the "end time" inspired among the desert fathers a sensitive understanding of the heart's movement toward renewal—which they called *penthos* or compunction.[38]

There is certainly evidence of the common juxtaposition of these ideas in desert literature. One of the anonymous desert sayings records that 'An old man said, "Let us weep, brothers, and let our eyes bring forth tears, before we go to where our tears will burn our bodies" '.[39]

At times, compunction and mourning are produced because of this awareness. St. Antony's *Letter 6* mentions 'the great grief which I have for you' at the prospect of the day of judgment, and the 'great labours of the saints, and their groanings on our behalf'.[40] In this case, spiritual mourning is experienced both by the saints and the author himself, on behalf of their spiritual children, an example of the other-orientedness of *penthos*. A different perspective is found when the reader is reminded that failure to weep now will lead to eternal weeping hereafter. As Klimakos asserts at the end of *Step 7*:

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[35] Trans Brooks, PO 18, iv (1924) 648.
[36] *Cyril of Scythopolis*, Sabas, 13, trans Price (1991) 105.
[37] *Step 5*, 9, 765C, Moore (1959) 100.
[38] 1993, 185.
[39] Anonymous saying 126, Section II, trans Stewart (1986) 38. This is identical to a saying attributed to Macarius, no. 34, PL 73, 861D, trans Ward (1975) 136.
[40] Trans Chitty (1975) 18.

> When our soul leaves this world we shall not be blamed for not having worked miracles, or for not having been theologians or contemplatives. But we shall certainly have to give an account to God of why we have not unceasingly mourned.[41]

For some anchorites, John of Lycopolis being one example,[42] their profound penitence and grief was symbolically expressed by their living in a tomb, a practice Klimakos refers to both as a literal abode[43] and as a Pauline death of the self which prefigures physical death. Klimakos advocates: 'Let the monastery be your tomb before the tomb'.[44] Dying to sin implies a resurrection to new life, this being a reason for the apparent contradiction of joyful mourning.

The joyfulness may also derive from the mourner's spiritual labours on behalf of another. The experience recorded in desert literature is never a selfish or exclusive one. The grief felt by a monk may be on behalf of the whole church,[45] for particular individuals, such as Maria, the niece of Abraham,[46] or for what Bassian the Solitary calls 'the delusion and captivity and destruction of the race of men', which caused him to experience 'mourning like a jackal, and lamentation like a jackal's whelp'.[47] *Penthos* is for the benefit of others. It also can confer gracious gifts and blessings on those who practice it. The sight of a penitent weeping, such as the uncontrolled weeping of John the Hesychast, may act as inspiration to others.[48]

Penthos also brings deep consolations. Benedicta Ward writes with great authority about the positive benefits accorded to the monks of Egypt through the repentance and grief they feel, describing the 'essential beginning in repentance, compunction, the piercing of the heart by sorrow', which is followed by 'the need to leave what is binding and constraining' such that the desert becomes 'an image of freedom'.[49]

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[41] *Step 7*, 70, PG 816D, Moore (1959) 123. Abba Poemen expresses the same idea. He commends Abba Arsenius for weeping in this world, because 'He who does not weep for himself here below will weep eternally hereafter'. PL 73, 955A, trans (1975) 18.

[42] Russell (1981) 56–7.

[43] *Step 1*, 6, PG 633C/D, Moore (1959) 50–51.

[44] *Step 4*, 94, PG 716B, Moore (1959) 90.

[45] See Brooks, *Introduction to John of Ephesus*, PO 18 (1924) 529–30, and St. Antony, *Letter 5*, trans Chitty (1975) 14.

[46] Ward (1987) 92–3.

[47] *John of Ephesus*, Chapter 41, trans Brooks, PO 18 (1924) 652–3.

[48] *Cyril of Scythopolis*, trans Price (1991) 225–6.

[49] Introduction to trans Russell (1981) 32.

The penitent who experiences the spiritual journey into the physical and spiritual desert loosens the bonds of sin, and restores the image of God. Whilst this restoration is a gracious event, it is accompanied by the acceptance of hard truths about human nature and the exercise of free will. Abba Matoes, corroborating his insight from Scripture, sums this up: 'The nearer a man draws to God, the more he sees himself as a sinner'.[50] Hence the need for continual compunction, as the process of repentance and restoration continues. It is arduous, as well as continual, work.[51] At times, the consolations are not merely spiritual but physical too, such as the miraculous provision of food to one who weeps.[52]

All in all, then, the desert tradition provides a coherent and consistent overview in relation to *penthos*. From the initial withdrawal into the desert, through self-awareness and penitence, to the joy of forgiveness, *penthos* accompanies and effects salvation, in the eyes of the desert Fathers and Mothers. It provides the 'golden spur in a soul which is stripped of all attachment and of all ties'.[53] It knits together the individual's growing self-awareness as penitent and his or her need to share in the plight of others; it expresses the relationship between this life and the age to come; it defines the labours and identity of the monk. From this tradition grew St. John of Sinai, known as Klimakos, whose writings include a chapter devoted to *penthos*. He, above all other desert theologians, stands as a typical exponent of Christian desert spirituality, and so his text is a ideal starting point for a study of *penthos* in its broadest forms throughout the ancient Mediterranean world.

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[50] Matoes, 2, trans Ward (1975) 143.

[51] Note Amma Syncletica, 1, another typical piece of desert wisdom describing the spiritual progression, which also draws on biblical citation to illustrate her point. trans Ward (1975) 230–1.

[52] Paternuthius, in trans Russell (1981) 83.

[53] Klimakos, *Step 7*, 1, 801D, Moore (1959) 114–5.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PLACE OF KLIMAKOS WITHIN THE DESERT TRADITION

Before embarking on a detailed exegesis of Klimakos' text on *penthos*, it is necessary to locate the author and his work within the wider desert tradition outlined above, and to comment on the genre of the text and its proposed audience.

The introductory items which precede *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*[1] provide many important clues to the identity of the writer, the genre of the text, its proposed audience and the circumstances in which it came to be written. All three modern translations include five prefatory pieces: an exchange of letters apparently between John, Abbot of Raithu and John, Abbot of Sinai, a biography by Daniel, monk of Raithu, an anonymous item, 'About Abba John' and a brief preface. Heppell, in the *Introduction* to Moore's edition[2] notes that early editions of the text show as many as eleven different prefatory items, from which each editor made a selection. The text itself corroborates some of the findings suggested by the prolegomena, as we shall see later.

In terms of the identity of the writer, the supposed dates of Klimakos' birth, tonsuring, higoumenate and death are relevant, as is the question of whether his identity corresponded with that of several other Johns of the period. Without attempting to reach conclusions about all the details, the main arguments concerning these issues are outlined here. Benesevic provides one of the earliest secondary sources researching higoumenate dates of St. John Klimakos. He notes that: 'The chronology of the life of Saint John Climacus merits a special study; it is very fluid'.[3] This observation about the

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[1] The text is found in PG 88, 585ff. The three modern translations are by Archimandrite Lazarus Moore (1959), with an introduction by M. Heppell, and that by D. Miller of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery (1991), which is a slight re-editing of Moore's work. In 1982, C. Luibheid and N. Russell produced a translation for the Paulist Press, New York.

[2] (1959) 25.

[3] Benesevic (1924) 124–172.

confusion and ambiguity surrounding Klimakos' identity and dates is pursued by later commentators. Without adding to the body of speculation, much can be gleaned from Klimakos' text and the other primary source material which accompanies it. These provide a substantial amount of information, though of course the hagiographical elements should be viewed with caution. The four items considered here pertain to the writing of *The Ladder*, at the end of the saint's life. The first letter purports to be from Abba John of Raithu to 'the admirable John, Abbot of Mount Sinai'.[4] This is the main evidence of the ultimate status of Klimakos and is corroborated by Daniel's biography,[5] which describes how he was 'raised by force to the duty of ruling the brethren'.[6] Putting aside the saint's conventional reluctance to assume positions of responsibility or public prestige, the fact that these letters have survived, along with the text to which they refer, could be taken as confirmation that John Klimakos was indeed an Abbot of the monastery on Mount Sinai. The note 'About Abba John' suggests that John relinquished this responsibility shortly before his death, having appointed his brother George as abbot 'even during his life'.[7]

The disputants cite two contemporary sources: references to an Abba John in John Moschus' *The Spiritual Meadow*,[8] and a correspondence in September 600[9] between Pope Gregory 1 and a John who was Abbot at Sinai about Gregory's provision of beds and other necessities for a pilgrim hospital on the holy Mount. Butler[10] and Baring-Gould[11] take these as evidence that 600 AD was the year of his accession, and 30th March 605 the date of his death. The Eastern Orthodox Calendar favours this date.[12] None of the twentieth century scholars agree with them. Benesevic sets out his preferred chronology which shows three Johns in quick succession as Higoumen of

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[4] 624Aff., Moore (1959) 42.

[5] 'A short account of the life of Abba John, abbot of the Holy Mount Sinai, surnamed the Scholastic and truly one of the saints,' written by Daniel, monk of Raithu, 'a worthy and virtuous man', 596A–608A, Moore (1959) 35–39.

[6] 605A, Moore (1959) 38.

[7] 609A, Moore (1959) 41.

[8] *Pratum Spirituale*, PG 87(3), 2852ff.

[9] St. Gregory 1.11, Ep.1.1.12, Ep.16, t.2, Butler (1836), 1091 footnote 4, 407.

[10] Vol. 1 (1836) 406–409.

[11] March volume (1879) 506–508. The entry on Klimakos in Smith and Wace (1882) is perfunctory and gives no information not contained in Baring-Gould and Butler.

[12] There is also a liturgy in his honour for the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent.

Sinai, one up to 590, Klimakos from 592–596, and a third, in 600, to whom Gregory wrote.[13] He also cites Nau's choice which give the period of his higoumenate from 639–649, when he died. Salaville[14] affirms Nau's dating. Chitty[15] favours a later date than the turn of the century. He is adamant that this John was not the one to whom Gregory wrote, but he gives no precise dates for the end of his life. He is more cautious about Moschos' evidence,[16] and ponders about the identity of the Anastasius referred to in the episode of John's tonsuring, and the references in *The Ladder* to a 'John the Sabaite'.[17] Benesevic is likewise reserved about the evidence of John Moschus. He does not attribute references to the Abba of Sinai to our saint, suggesting rather that Moschus' silence about this 'obliges us rather to think that he arrived after the death of St. John, at the period when preparation for the canonisation of this higoumen were only beginning'.[18] Whilst drawing on accurately cited primary material for their sources, neither Chitty, Benesevic or Nau provide much more than an argument from silence, in the case of Moschus' evidence. The plethora of identically named figures at the time creates uncertainty which none of them are able to resolve.

Evidence of his place, and date, of birth, and details of his early life is even less reliable. Daniel says airily that: 'I cannot say exactly and for certain in what memorable city that great man was born and brought up prior to his athletic and ascetic life'.[19] Petit finds this ignorance strange in a near contemporary of his subject, and suggests that the uncertainty about the identity and pre-monastic life of John was fostered by a desire to ignore the possibility that John had been married.[20] Subsequent biographers offer a wide range of options. Butler and Baring-Gould give 525 as the likely date of his birth, and Palestine as the location. He was known in his youth as

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[13] (1924) 171–2.
[14] (1923) 440.
[15] (1966) 168–177.
[16] *Pratum* 115, PG 65. 233AB. Chitty comments: 'But we cannot be sure either that this chapter really belongs to the *Meadow*, or that its John of Cilician is, in fact, the addressee of the *Ladder*.' (1966) 173.
[17] For example, 'The famous John the Sabbaite told me things worth hearing', *Step 4*, 110, 720A, Moore (1959) 92.
[18] (1924) 170.
[19] 596A, Moore (1959) 35.
[20] (1924) cols 690–3.

a 'scholastikos.'[21] This term was virtually synonymous with 'Rhetor' at this period, and Petit[22] argues for his being the John Rhetor mentioned by John Moschos. Heppell explores this debate,[23] and concludes that Petit's argument is not valid. Couilleau's extensive article[24] adds weight to Heppell's opinion, by noting that Moschos visited Sinai between 580 and 590 and made no mention of this famous spiritual father.

Hausherr[25] is keen to prove that although called *scholastikos*, there was nothing to show that Klimakos was a doctor or teacher. In a rather muddled paragraph, Hausherr argues that Klimakos would have been astonished to have been thought of as having a 'theology', and that theologians were the opposite of scholastics.[26] Salaville follows Nau's dates,[27] and considers c. 575 as the likely year of Klimakos' birth, and believes that the term *scholastikos* refers to Klimakos' eloquence and literary merits, and not any 'science' acquired in his youth.

The internal evidence about the early years of the subject fails to give a definite answer to the problem, and in this context is perhaps less important than an appreciation of Klimakos' milieu and the significance of Sinai at this time. Klimakos draws on varied images and metaphors, taken from a wide range of professions and experiences. For example, he frequently uses maritime images, a factor which leads Salaville to take as definite evidence that John had seen the sea as a child.[28] But the metaphor of the soul as a ship at sea, steering by the stars of the godhead, the spiritual father or God as the helmsman of the soul, etc., are commonplaces in the desert literature. Their use may not reflect first hand experience, merely the observations of a well-educated and inquisitive young man, who

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[21] Σχολαστικός. The term refers generally to any student who had been educated in rhetoric (*Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 1852), and in particular advocates or lawyers. We should not confuse him with the John Scholastikos, neo-Chalcedonian theologian and Bishop of Skythopolis, c. 536–50.

[22] 1924, columns 690–693. He notes that Moschus mentions an Abbot John the Scholastic, PG 87, 2690.

[23] In trans Moore (1959) 15.

[24] (1972/3) cols 369–09.

[25] (1987) 381–407.

[26] (1987) 382.

[27] (1923) 442.

[28] (1923) 442–3.

is steeped in his own first-hand knowledge of the traditions of spiritual fatherhood. The text itself gives ample evidence of a man genuinely interested in human nature, who would have observed and listened to those around him—and even during his period as a hermit he did have a disciple and receive visitors, as the text testifies.[29] Despite his period of silence, mentioned by his biographer,[30] and his reluctance to write about the issues of loquacity and silence,[31] he did not stop up his ears. If he did indeed enter the monastery at the age of sixteen, even the most precocious youth would not have advanced very far in a career by then. On the other hand, he twice mentions seeing petitioners and visitors to a palace.[32] Did this relate to a visit as a child, or something observed in adult life, or was it merely figurative? Davril cites an example of such figurative use in a narrative of a monk praying with tears being like one who begs for pity at the feet of a king.[33] Klimakos was clearly taken on visits, at least to neighbouring monasteries, as part of his monastic training, since he refers to this.[34]

His biographer's designation 'surnamed the Scholastic' may mean no more than that he was an educated youth who had opportunities for great things, but who chose to renounce them because of his monastic calling.[35] This would be standard hagiographic practice, commending the humility, piety and selflessness of the subject. Certainly, the appellation 'Klimakos' would not have been that by which he was known for most of his life, as he only wrote *The Ladder* in the last years of his life, and this text was known originally as 'Spiritual Tablets'. It is therefore certain that the eponymous title is a posthumous tribute.

The young John's life, as recorded by Daniel, follows a classic desert formula. At the early age of sixteen, he renounced the world, and attached himself to a 'superb director'.[36] According to Daniel's biography, this spiritual father, Martyrius, died after nineteen years

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[29] *Step 6*, 16, 796C, Moore (1959) 112.
[30] 605A, Moore (1959) 38.
[31] *Step 11*, 8, 852C, Moore (1959) 135.
[32] *Step 1*, 18, 640A, Moore (1959) 54, and *Step 7*, 43, 809B, Moore (1959) 119.
[33] (1987) 132–39.
[34] *Step 5*, 26, 780A, Moore (1959) 106: 'Having stayed for 30 days in the prison, impatient as I am, I returned to the monastery and the great shepherd.'
[35] A similar story-line is found in the *Vita* of Symeon the New Theologian.
[36] 597B, Moore (1959) 35.

of companionship, and John retired to a hermit's cell at Thola,[37] five miles from Sinai. He remained there for forty years, and in due course acquired his own disciple, Moses.[38] Daniel stresses John's strengths as a spiritual counsellor, claiming:

> very many bear witness as to his spiritual instructions, namely all those who were saved through him, or are even now being saved.[39]

This legacy of empirical and private leadership is as important, in desert terms, as any written bequest. Klimakos' many references to the importance of choosing the right spiritual father, and the nature of that relationship,[40] could form a separate study. The obedience which he learned from his spiritual father, however, is significant, since he alleges it to be his reason for writing *The Ladder*.[41] For Klimakos, the authority of his monastic superior is akin to that of Christ on the Judgment day.[42] The power of the spiritual father's prayers for his child means that:

> It is better to sin against God than against our father; for when we anger God, our director can reconcile us; but when he is incensed against us, there is no-one to propitiate him for us.[43]

His great sanctity and ultimate elevation to Abbot, another common topos in hagiography, were foretold by an Abba Anastasius and Abba Strategius, whose identities are shrouded in as much confusion as that of John himself.[44] Klimakos makes frequent mention of the comparative merits of the coenobitic and eremetical life styles.[45] The insights he provides and the anecdotes he tells draw on his own experiences of these two ways of life.

One recurrent image in the prefatory items merits particular attention, that of John as the new Moses. This image is used by John

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[37] *Step 6*, *17* and *18*, 796C, Moore (1959) 112. See Devreesse (April 1940) 205–23 and Chitty (1966) 170–1 for discussion about the location and status of this fort, built by Justinian.

[38] 605Aff., Moore (1959) 37–8.

[39] 605B, Moore (1959) 39.

[40] For example, *Step 4*, 120, 725C, Moore (1959) 96.

[41] 'Reply', 625D, Moore (1959) 44.

[42] *Step 7*, 19, 805B, Moore (1959) 116.

[43] *Step 4*, 121, 725D, Moore (1959) 97.

[44] 'About Abba John', 608B, Moore (1959) 40–41.

[45] For example, *Step 1*, 25 and 26, 641A–B, Moore (1959) 56; *Step 2*, 12, 657C, Moore (1959) 59; *Step 4*, 76, 712C, Moore (1959) 87–8, and *Step 4*, 119, 725C, Moore (1959) 96.

himself, to describe in general terms a spiritual leader of Christians leading the new Israel out of their captivity in sin. He writes: 'Those of us who wish to go out of Egypt and to fly from Pharaoh, certainly need some Moses as a mediator with God'.[46] Daniel attributes the term to John himself, as does John of Raithu in his letter.

The identification of the location of Mount Sinai, a peninsula north of the Red Sea, was well established before the sixth century. It had deep rooted associations with the encounter between Moses and God, and the mountain had been inhabited by Christian hermits since the fourth century, first the fertile valleys and, later on, the mountain itself. The monastery built in the mid sixth century by Justinian (later known as St. Catherine's), contains a mosaic of the transfiguration which Klimakos is likely to have known. Parry describes the relationship of this iconic representation to the spiritual life, as conceived by Gregory of Nyssa and Evagrios,[47] who explicitly names Mount Sinai as 'the place of God which was seen by our ancestors'.[48] To attribute prophetic powers such as those of Moses to a saint on Mount Sinai might, therefore, be an obvious tribute. However, in the context of the writing of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, this accolade assumes particular emphasis: both Daniel and John of Raithu compare the written transmission of God's word via Moses to the task set John of recording 'what you have seen in divine vision like Moses of old on the same mountain'.[49] In other words, they are comparing Klimakos' work to the Ten Commandments, according it considerable authority. Klimakos himself makes use of the image, though it is not clear from the context if he is referring to his own text or the Bible:

> Let us who are led by the Spirit of God enter with us into this spiritual and wise gathering, holding in their spiritual hands the God-inscribed tablets of knowledge.[50]

The analogy is elaborated on by both Daniel and John. Daniel, however, takes pains to remind the reader that this new Moses lives according to the life of Christian faith, hence his current abode in

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[46] *Step 1*, 7, 633D, Moore (1959) 51 and see also *Step 3*, 11, 665C, Moore (1959) 62. He also refers to Moses in *Step 26*, 34, 1021A, Moore (1959) 207.
[47] (1996) 122–123.
[48] *Praktikos*, PG 40, 1244A, trans Bamberger (1981) xci.
[49] 'Letter of Abba John', 624B, Moore (1959) 42.
[50] *Step 25*, 3, 988C, Moore (1959) 190.

the new Jerusalem,[51] unlike his predecessor. His description of John's encounter with the Lord recalls the Transfiguration, and it portrays the event in terms of an experience of theosis:

> He approached the mountain, he entered the unapproachable darkness and, mounting by spiritual steps, he received the divinely written law and contemplation; he opened his mouth for the word of God, and inhaled the Spirit; then he exhaled a word from the good treasure of his heart.[52]

Daniel's words reveal the similarity between the Deuteronomic language and that of the Christian vision of God. For Klimakos, the weight of Hebrew prophecy lies primarily in its being the precursor to the new revelation of the Gospel: he places Moses in the context of the nature of monastic life, comparing his part as the beginning of the Law, which is subsequently perfected:

> For humility is the beginning of dispassion, as Moses is the beginning of the Law; and the daughter perfects the mother, as Mary perfects the Synagogue.[53]

Klimakos' credential as the new Moses is further borne out, in the hagiography, by the story of the reappearance of the prophet Moses at the feast which celebrated John's accession as Higumen.[54] This vision of Klimakos as new Moses, bearing God's word to the New Israel, provides authority to his text, and goes some way to explain its enduring importance within the liturgical life of monks in the eastern Christian tradition.

Evidence about the intended recipients of the text is provided in the prolegemena. Daniel states that it was 'the whole flock', and elsewhere the abbot who requests the book for the benefit of 'stupid people like us'.[55] John stresses his unworthiness to respond to the request of his fellow Abbot and states that it is only out of obedience and humility that he undertakes the charge:

> Had I not been upheld by fear and the great danger of rejecting the yoke of holy obedience, that mother of all the virtues, I would not have rashly ventured on a task that is beyond my powers.[56]

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[51] 605B, Moore (1959) 39, corroborating his assurance in his opening lines on 596A, Moore (1959) 35.
[52] 605A, Moore (1959) 38.
[53] *Step 4*, 71, 709D, Moore (1959) 87.
[54] 'About Abba John', 608C, Moore (1959) 40.
[55] 605B, Moore (1959) 39 and 624B, Moore (1959) 42.
[56] 'Reply', 625C, Moore (1959) 44.

He disclaims that it was from any awareness of superior knowledge that he wrote, and refutes any merit in his work, claiming that with his 'poor and scanty knowledge and in my stammering way I have sketched in ink alone the bare outline of living words'. He leaves it to his Abbot, who he addresses as 'chief and best of teachers', to 'embellish and clarify this sketch.'[57]

The obvious audience for a work of this sort, written by an Abbot, at the bequest of another Abbot, would seem to be other monks. Certainly, Klimakos places his text within the continuing tradition of wisdom transmitted from one wise elder to another. He states that he is writing at the command of those who are his superiors in both understanding and sanctity, 'in unquestioning obedience, let us stretch out our unworthy hand to the true servants of God who devoutly compel us . . . Let us write this treatise with a pen taken from their knowledge and dipped in the ink of humility'.[58]

He refers to his intended readers as 'simple folk like us'[59] and 'Brother athletes'[60] whom he encourages to 'ascend . . . ascend eagerly'.[61] He addresses them as penitents whom he urges to:

> Gather together and come near all you who have angered God; come and listen to what I expound to you; assemble and see what He has revealed to my soul for your edification.[62]

He is also quite explicit that he is writing to those in either a monastic community, or at least within a spiritual father/disciple relationship, in which the need for obedience is paramount, asserting that 'our chapter must consider the case of those living in obedience; all the more so because this chapter is especially meant for them'.[63]

Useful though this evidence is, it leaves some issues unanswered. Is he really writing to all the monks, or just his fellow Abbot? The exchange of letters between the two Abbots, and Daniel's life give some evidence. Daniel claims the request to come from the entire monastic community:

> Being implored by the whole flock, this new seer of Sinai descended to us by thought from on high and offered us his divinely written

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[57] 'Reply', 623A/B, Moore (1959) 44/5.
[58] *Step 1*, 2, 632C, Moore (1959) 49.
[59] *Step 1*, 2, 632C, Moore (1959) 49.
[60] *Step 4*, 126, 728B, Moore (1959) 98.
[61] *Step 30*, 36, 1160C, Moore (1959) 266.
[62] *Step 5*, 2, 764C, Moore (1959) 98.
[63] *Step 27*, 39, 1108B, Moore (1959) 242.

> tablets, which contain directions outwardly for the active life, and inwardly for the life of divine vision.[64]

Abbot John of Raithu reiterates this in his letter, in which he presents himself as the spokesman of the community.[65]

John's response is intriguing. The reasons he gives for agreeing to provide this text demonstrate the humility and obedience which are the hallmark of the spiritually mature: indeed, a genuine protestation of unworthiness to offer advice becomes almost the very reason why a monk is fitted to do so! He claims that he is addressing his work not to the Abbot, but 'to the God-called community who together with me are learning under you, O best of teachers!'[66] If this is taken at face value, this suggests that his own monastic community was in some way subordinate to that of Raithu, or that he was not an Abbot himself, but an assistant to John of Raithu. Yet the letters give the titles of both men as Abbot, so this should be read as another example of John's humility, or of what he felt to be an appropriate manner of addressing a fellow abbot.

The life by Daniel, and the introductory items, imply that this was the work of a very old man who was reverenced as much for his holy life and spiritual fatherhood as for the brief spell he spent as higoumen. The text mentions in its earliest pages that spiritual growth is not restricted to those living as monastics; married people can also benefit from its disciplines.[67] Klimakos is doing more here than acknowledging the varied pre-monastic lives of those in his community; he seeks to make his insights available to seculars who may encounter it while on a visit, or by other means such as spiritual direction from a monk within the monastery. This intention seems to have been achieved: Martin[68] and Heppell[69] testify to the great general influence and popularity of *The Ladder*, and cite the number of extant manuscripts and many translations as evidence of this. The finer points of precisely when, and for whom, it was originally written are as yet unresolved, and provide an intriguing opportunity for further deliberation elsewhere; however, Klimakos' attitude to his

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[64] 605B, Moore (1959) 39.
[65] 624B, Moore (1959) 42.
[66] 'Reply', 623B, Moore (1959) 45.
[67] *Step 1*, 21, 632C, Moore (1959) 54–5, noted by Hausherr (1987) 392.
[68] 1954, 6ff.
[69] Introduction in Moore (1959) 25–33.

apparent audience offer a rare alternative to the heavily circumscribed focus of Isaac and other monastic writers.

Klimakos' conventional modesty in designating this as a 'sketch' underplays the scope of the extant text. It is a substantial and detailed work, occupying over 530 columns in PG 88, and some 270 pages in English translation. There is no internal evidence to suggest that this comment of Klimakos is other than a topos of humility, and is meant as a courteous recognition of the merits of his mentor.

The text has been known by various titles. In Migne's edition[70] it is known as *scala paradisi*, the name by which it has come down to us. It is designated as an ascetic treatise. Klimakos himself refers to the concept of the ladder:

> As far as my meagre knowledge permits (for I am like an unskilled architect) I have constructed a ladder of ascent. Let each look to see on which step he is standing.[71]

He presents this as, to some extent, a defining structure for the work, though in fact the ladder structure is fairly loose. The real power of the phrase is as a metaphor for the process of spiritual growth towards maturity, a literal 'growing up.' As Owen Chadwick notes:

> The characteristically ascetic view sees the Christian life as an ascent of a ladder. The concept of the *scala perfectionis*, of the 'ascent of Mount Carmel', underlies Catholic spirituality in both east and west.[72]

Its resonance with the whole image of Jacob's ladder, a reference picked up by the anonymous preface,[73] suggests the meeting of earthly and heavenly, such as that of the Transfiguration. Both St Gregory of Nazianzus[74] and St. John Chrysostom[75] employ the same image of Jacob's ladder to describe the progress of virtue. Heppell notes the Biblical allusion and expresses reservations about the extent to which the concept of ladder is a structural element rather than a metaphorical one.[76] The commissioner of the work claims, in advance of receiving the text, that the 'precious inscriptions' will be 'as a ladder set up to lead aspirants to the gates of heaven pure and

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[70] PG 88, 579ff.
[71] *Step 27*, 30, 1105B, Moore (1959) 241.
[72] (1950) 77.
[73] 628D, Moore (1959) 42–3.
[74] *Homily 43*, PG36, col 592Dff.
[75] *Homily 82 on John*, PG 59, col 454ff.
[76] Introduction, in Moore (1959) 19.

blameless'.[77] He ascribes to it even more benefit than that of Jacob's ladder. Couilleau[78] notes that some manuscripts bear the title *πλάκες πνεύματικάι*, closer in meaning to the Holy Tablets of Moses, than a designation as a treatise. Many of the illustrations examined by Martin also use this designation.[79]

In terms of genre, whilst the circumstances of the commissioning of the work and its various titles suggest a monastic context, *The Ladder* does not fit exclusively into one single category. It contains elements of spiritual autobiography, including details of the author's feelings about self-imposed exile:

> When we have lived a year or two away from our family, and have acquired some piety or contrition or continence, then vain thoughts begin to rise up in us and urge us to go again to our homeland, 'for the edification of many'.[80]

He also mentions experiences during the training he received, such as a miraculous conversion of a putrefying body into myrrh 'a week before my departure'.[81] There are anecdotes, written at first and second hand, which recall the *Apophthegmata*, the writings of Cyril of Scythopolis, or John of Ephesus. For example, a substantial part of Step 4 is a series of anecdotes about a repentant robber, a magistrate called Isidore, a monk called Lawrence, a bursar Abba Cyrus, Macedonius the archdeacon and others.[82] There are also brief aphorisms as striking as those of Evagrios or Diadochus, in which Klimakos gives a one line definition of a virtue or vice, for example on vainglory,[83] or the series of attributes of a monk in Step 23.[84] In Step 26, 17 and 19 he gives two 'alphabets'.[85] Despite the refutation in his 'Reply', the text at times reads like a monastic typikon.

The anonymous author of the introduction to the Holy Transfiguration Monastery's translation refers back to the Moses analogy in an attempt to define the category of this work:

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[77] 625A, Moore (1959) 42–3.
[78] (1972/3) cols 369–89.
[79] 1954.
[80] *Step 3*, 11, 665A–B, Moore (1959) 61.
[81] *Step 4*, 34, 697B–C, Moore (1959) 78–9.
[82] Ibid., 696–7, Moore (1959) 78.
[83] *Step 22*, 23 and 25, 952D, Moore (1959) 176.
[84] Numbers 22–31, 969A–B, Moore (1959) 182.
[85] 1017A–D, Moore (1959) 204.

> It differs from the tablets in as much as Grace differs from the Law. The tablets contained rules and regulations, statutes and prohibitions, but this heavenly book contains rather observations and insights concerning the goal of our calling as Christians and monastics.[86]

The two need not be mutually exclusive; the Rules attributed to Basil, and the monastic handbooks of Paul of Evergetinos provide clear examples of Christian 'rules and regulations'. However, *The Ladder* reads as more reflective than prescriptive, and observes rather than orders. Chryssavgis makes a helpful distinction in describing it as 'a testimony, not a treatise, a homily perhaps, but not a doctrinal discourse with a fixed set of axioms and rules'.[87]

The Ladder of Divine Ascent is indeed a testimony. It bears witness to a life which knew both the pleasures of the world and the joys of the spirit, the life of a man who understood the need to prefer the latter, and the temptations of the former. In acknowledging this to be true for himself, Klimakos knew it to be the case also for his likely reader.

In addition to the variety of genres noted above, there is in Klimakos extended analysis of spiritual and psychological issues, which are clearly separated from the body of his text. Examples of this are the section on the nature of dreams at the end of Step 3; 25–29,[88] and an extended analysis on discernment which is followed by a 'brief summary' itself some six pages long.[89] Heppell sees this aspect of Klimakos' text as the most significant difference between it and the *Apophthegmata*, which are more narrative and anecdotal.[90] This is surely a distinctive contribution to the monastic tradition on the part of our author, and in offering it he demonstrates the extent to which he has personally 'lived out' the matters on which he now seeks to give advice to a later generation.

Whilst not overtly providing answers to the question of what genre his text was, Klimakos shows some self-awareness as an author. He states that he was formed by, and writing within, a tradition:

> Many learned teachers treat next, after the tyrant just described, the thousand-headed demon of avarice. We, unlearned as we are, do not

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[86] (1991) xix–xx.
[87] (1985(ii)) 142.
[88] 669B, Moore (1959) 64–5.
[89] *Step 26*, 110ff. 1056D, Moore (1959) 217–236.
[90] Introduction in Moore (1959) 18–19.

> wish to change the order of the learned, and we have therefore followed the same convention and rule.[91]

He names but few of the Fathers,[92] however, as is normative in patristic texts, he refers to many more without attributing his source. For example, as Ware points out,[93] Mark the Hermit's teachings on temptation are clearly echoed in Klimakos' analysis of sin and repentance, although he does not acknowledge his source. Klimakos also shares with Mark an understanding of the continual movement between perpetual thanksgiving and repentance, which provides a source for Klimakos' concept of joyful mourning. This communality of ideas about the nature of the human condition, and both the attributed and silent use of earlier exponents is, in itself, evidence of a secure place within the desert tradition.

Having established the basic background to the text, it is now possible to analyse and exegete Step Seven of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, which, as the title *Περὶ τοῦ χαροποιοῦ πένθους* (concerning joy-making Penthos) suggests, is entirely devoted to this issue of spiritual mourning and the association of godly sorrow with joy and grace.

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[91] *Step 16*, 1, 924C, Moore (1959) 162–3.

[92] Evagrios, *Step 14*, 12, 865A, Moore (1959) 141; Gregory the Theologian appears twice, in *Step 15*, foreward, which appears in PG as a scholion to the previous step, Moore (1959) 146, and in *Step 22*, 1, 949A, Moore (1959) 173. Raderi, in his prefaces to the text in PG 88, lists a number of Fathers allegedly cited by Klimakos.

[93] (1965) 297–8.

CHAPTER THREE

EXEGESIS OF STEP 7 OF *THE LADDER OF DIVINE ASCENT*

This section starts with a synopsis of the manuscript tradition, and a note on the authorship of the *scholia*, and then examines the text itself, concentrating on the concept of 'ladder' as both structural device and metaphor for spiritual growth, the location of Step 7 within *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, the title of this step, its structure and contents. Klimakos' own extended analysis of *penthos* is assessed.

J.R. Martin provides the most recent assessment of the manuscripts of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.[1] His comment that there is no modern critical edition of the text still, sadly, holds true. Migne's text relies on the 1633 edition by Matthaeus Raderus, which draws on the eight extant manuscripts.[2] The treatise has been translated into Syriac, Latin, Arabic, Armenian and Russian, attesting to its popularity over a broad geographical area, in later centuries.In this century, it has been translated into English by Archimandrite Lazarus Moore, D Miller of the Holy Transfiguration Monastery, and Colm Luibheid/Norman Russell. Migne's text, which Martin finds 'reasonably accurate' is the basis for this exegesis. The English translation referred to is that of Moore, in addition to my own translation of Step 7.

Migne's text of *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* is blessed with many supplementary comments in the form of *scholia*, which Migne attributes to John of Raithu. Hofmann[3] examines the role played by Photios's *scholia*. Some twenty years later, Gribomont explored the authorship of these passages in some depth and concluded that 'The scholia attributed to John of Raithu have nothing in common with the humble higumen of Sinai'.[4] He believes them to be the work of Angelo Clareno, a Franciscan who worked on a translation of the

[1] (1954) 6/7.
[2] Migne cites these in PG 88, 621/2, cf. Martin (1954) 6.
[3] (1941) 461–79.
[4] (1960) 357.

text at the end of the fifteenth century. Interesting though these discussions are, they do not throw much light on the main topic examined here.

The Structure of The Ladder *and the Context of Step 7*

The main body of the work takes the form of thirty steps, designated 'gradus' in the Latin and *λόγος* in the Greek. This pattern is chosen, according to the anonymous author of the preface and attested by Step 30 itself, because it corresponded to the thirty years' of Christ's hidden ministry.[5] Commentators are divided as to the extent to which Klimakos attempts, and achieves, a systematic structure. Kazhdan and Nelson, writing from a predominantly historical rather than theological stance, describe it as:

> an unsystematic presentation of vices and virtues, in scenes and more often in direct indoctrinations and definitions; they do not form a hierarchy of modes of behaviour and are only superficially connected with the concept of the ladder.[6]

Krumbacher[7] proposes a very simple division into the vices to be avoided and the virtues to be embraced in the Christian journey. As Salaville points out,[8] this is too loose a division to be very helpful, and he details three stages: renunciation of and departure from the world, interior detachment from worldly affairs and thirdly, the process of pilgrimage or retreat from the world. Couilleau, on the other hand, posits a more sophisticated system of 'parallel opposition, familiar in antique thought',[9] in which Step 2 balances 28, Step 4, 26 and so on. He finds in it a five part structure, moving through renunciation of the world, through desirable virtues and undesirable vices, to the crowning of the practical life and ultimate union with God. Martin[10] breaks the text into no less than seven sections.

Some commentators, such as Heppell,[11] have suggested that the word 'ladder' describes the process of spiritual growth rather than

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[5] See also Rabois-Bousquet and Salaville (1923) 447.
[6] *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 1060–1.
[7] (1897) 143–44.
[8] (1923) 448.
[9] (1972/3) 373.
[10] (1954) 6ff.
[11] In trans Moore (1959) 19.

a formal structure for the treatise. In fact, both meanings of the term are found in the text. Klimakos himself makes reference to both this general idea of the spiritual mountaineer progressing upwards,[12] and more specifically to the ladder of angels seen by Jacob,[13] a Biblical image which contributes to the wider understanding of spiritual growth as an ascent. Close examination of the text also discloses some evidence of Klimakos (or possibly a subsequent editor) employing a ladder structure within the text. There is a relatively sophisticated use of passages linking the thirty steps, which suggests a conscious method behind the ordering and juxtaposition of the sections, and at times a specific sense of one state leading to another. The deliberate ordering of his material would suggest either that it was written originally in the format of a sequence, or that if the text as it survives is, in fact, a collection of homilies from different periods of his life, the process of collation was undertaken with some thought as to congruence and association of ideas. The issue is more complex than Kazhdan and Nelson's dismissal of the concept of a ladder format may suggest: Klimakos' own words provide the evidence to refute this stance.

In the early sections of the treatise, which deal with the vices, Klimakos states that he is placing each within 'its appropriate place in this chain of vices',[14] a chain which is like 'those which fell from the chief Apostle Peter' whereas 'the holy virtues are like Jacob's ladder'. This may, of course, refer to an earlier version of the text than the extant text, and may be an editorial comment. However, in the body of his text, Klimakos overtly explains the dependence of one stage on its precursor:

> the virtues, leading from one to another, bear him who chooses them up to Heaven; but the vices by their nature beget and stifle one another.[15]

In all but eight of the steps, Klimakos mentions an adjoining step.[16] This is done with varying degrees of thoroughness, the simplest level being simply the introduction of the keyword of the next stage, as is found, for example at the end of Step 27, where he sums up the merit of *hesychia* as being full of prayer, the next subject he writes on. At times the sequence is described in metaphorical terms, such

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[12] *Step 14*, 12, 865B, Moore (1959) 141.
[13] *Step 15*, 27, 885A, Moore (1959) 149.
[14] *Step 13*, 1, 857D, Moore (1959) 138.
[15] *Step 9*, 1, 841A, Moore (1959) 129.
[16] Numbers 3, 7, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 28.

as in Step 4, where he states that 'As the flower precedes the fruit, so exile either of body or will always precedes obedience'.[17] At other times he uses a Biblical illustration to justify his sequence, such as 'Once John outran Peter; and now obedience precedes repentance. For the one who came first is a symbol of obedience, and the other of repentance.'[18]

He cites the practice of his predecessors in the tradition, both where he concurs with their authority in choosing a certain progression,[19] and when he is apparently puzzled by it.[20] He also refers to divine inspiration, referring to 'the order in which the Lord has put these virtues'.[21] One of his linking passages mentions, in order, as many as four topics he will next treat.[22] If this is editorial, it demonstrates a considerable ability on the part of Klimakos or his editor to integrate redactional matter smoothly, and it well matches the style of the rest of the text, suggesting that the construction of *The Ladder* is not an arbitrary or haphazard phenomenon.

Throughout the linking passages are found much discussion of the familiar concept of engendering of vices and virtues, and whether there are seven or eight deadly sins:[23] these draw on the treatment of the issue by Gregory Nazianzen,[24] and refer implicitly to that by Evagrios.[25] As well as indicating a spiritual progression, this image of begetting is also used to show the intimate relationship between psychological states, most notably for this study in his description of prayer as 'the mother and also the daughter of tears'.[26] This issue of whether *penthos* and *katanuxis* generate each other, or if the latter always precedes the former, was to fuel much subsequent academic debate.

The word 'ladder' is not found explicitly in Step 7, in either its structural sense or as an image of spiritual growth. However, this

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[17] *Step 4*, 1, 677C, Moore (1959) 66.
[18] *Step 4* last lines, 728D, translated as preface to *Step 5*, Moore (1959) 98.
[19] *Step 16*, 1, 924C, Moore (1959) 162 'Many learned teachers treat next . . . the thousand-headed demon of avarice'.
[20] *Step 17*, 16, 929B, Moore (1959) 165.
[21] *Step 24*, 1, 980C, Moore (1959) 186.
[22] *Step 17*, 16, 929B, Moore (1959) 165.
[23] Note in particular an extended passage at the end of *Step 26*, 65, 1073Dff., Moore (1959) 235/6, and also *Step 13*, 1, 860A, Moore (1959) 138; the prologue to *Step 15*, 880D, Moore (1959) 146; *Step 3*, 6, 664D, Moore (1959) 61; *Step 18*, 6, 933D, Moore (1959) 167/8.
[24] *Step 22*, 1, 948Dff., Moore (1959) 173.
[25] *Praktikos*, 6ff., trans Bamberger (1981) 16ff.
[26] *Step 28*, 1, 1129A, Moore (1959) 250.

section abounds in images of spiritual progression, both in terms of the movement effected by the process of *metanoia* and *penthos* and in the specific sense of one spiritual state, be it good or bad, leading to or being related to another. The interpretation of *penthos* as something which moves one on is found in the very first section of Step 7, with the definition of *penthos* as 'the golden spur in a soul stripped naked of all attachments and possessions'.[27] In choosing the word 'spur' rather than merely talking of the conscience being pricked, Klimakos suggests something which not only pierces but causes to move faster, as when he uses the word 'pursue' in Step 7, 61.[28] 'Golden' suggests that this impetus is from God, not merely human endeavour.[29] Thus pricked by the soul's grief, the heart 'diligently pursues its aim', like the racehorse spurred on to the finish. The mourner is advised not to cease working at it,[30] because, like the motion of the sea, 'with time and patience, little by little, these things of which we have spoken will come and be perfected in us'.[31]

He assures us that once anyone is struck with contrition, they will flee from their own body 'as if it were an enemy'.[32] This movement from a state of sinfulness towards one of perfection is achieved by both human efforts and the grace of God, Klimakos tells us: 'Both in creation and in compunction there is that which moves by itself and that which is moved otherwise'.[33] He employs verbs indicating strong movement to describe the wrong sort of tears being 'driven away'[34] by spiritual tears, and ploughing the soul with mourning in order to be able to sow 'blessed dispassion'.[35] These vibrant images of action and movement—the goaded racehorse, the inevitable wearing away by the sea, the ploughing up of the soil of materiality[36]—portray *penthos* as a spiritual experience which is profoundly rooted in the physical nature of mankind. Klimakos thus demonstrates not only a compellingly colourful style of writing, but also an understanding

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[27] *Step 7*, 1, 801C/D, Moore (1959) 113.
[28] 813D, Moore (1959) 122.
[29] This point is elaborated on by Chryssavgis (1985)(i) 131–136.
[30] *Step 7*, 9, 804B, Moore (1959) 114.
[31] *Step 7*, 20, 805B, Moore (1959) 116.
[32] *Step 7*, 28, 808B, Moore (1959) 117.
[33] *Step 7*, 25, 805D, Moore (1959) 116/7.
[34] *Step 7*, 34, 808C, Moore (1959) 118.
[35] *Step 7*, 53, 813A, Moore (1959) 121.
[36] The image of ploughing the soul in preparation for virtuous life is also found in John of Karpathos, 'Texts for the monks in India', no. 30, trans *Philokalia* vol. 1, 305.

of Christian anthropology which takes full account of its ordinary earthiness as well as its potential for spiritual purity.

Klimakos continues the argument on the source and results of vices and virtues so eloquently set out by Evagrios. In Step 7, he presents instances of the dependence of one spiritual stage upon another, and some discussion of how *penthos* can be gained or lost. For Klimakos, this is a complex issue. Mourning for sin depends on certain preconditions, and has certain results, but it is not a simple process of mourning and tears being begotten by one state and leading to another. He tells us that 'there are many means of begetting these things',[37] both positive and negative, and it is necessary to exercise discernment to discover which are the right sort of tears, a subject which will be considered in more detail below. Mourning may precede 'blessed dispassion',[38] and produce fear. This in turn produces fearlessness, which leads to joy.[39] Other tears, more fragile than those produced by fear, stem from the heart's movement towards perfect love.[40] Tears are not the thoughtless product of an irrational state, but 'are born from the mind's thought, and the father of thoughts is a rational mind'.[41] However, the involvement of the mind in starting to grieve does not mean that someone can make a conscious decision to mourn, since this can lead to vanity.[42] The ability or predisposition to mourn is a phenomenon involving the whole person in a continuing process of spiritual growth. Throughout Step 7, Klimakos expounds a hierarchy of spiritual advancement, a triadic movement from 'one who is still progressing in blessed penthos' through 'the more advanced person' to 'the perfected one'.[43] In addition to this general sense of *penthos* being part of the process of illumination and perfection, there are also specific links in Step 7 to its adjoining Steps in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Step 6 deals with the remembrance of death; Step 8 with freedom from anger and meekness, so to understand the context of Step 7 a little more, it is important to locate it within the text as a whole.

The juxtaposition of mourning and the remembrance of death

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[37] *Step 7*, 32, 808B, Moore (1959) 117.
[38] *Step 7*, 53, 813A, Moore (1959) 121.
[39] *Step 7*, 56, 813B, Moore (1959) 121/2.
[40] *Step 7*, 66, 816B, Moore (1959) 123.
[41] *Step 7*, 17, 805A, Moore (1959) 115.
[42] *Step 7*, 26, 808A, Moore (1959) 117, cf. Step 7, 30, 808B, Moore (1959) 117.
[43] *Step 7*, 4, 804A, Moore (1959) 113.

and the fearful day of judgement in desert literature provides a point of departure here. Klimakos defines the very nature of a monk by means of these connected ideas: he is 'a mourning soul that both asleep and awake is unceasingly occupied with the remembrance of death'.[44] As a means of remaining focused on death, Klimakos advocates the practice of frequenting the tombs in order to remind one of death.[45] He shares this stance with other desert fathers, such as the authors of the *Apophthegmata*. In Step 5: *On Repentance*, Klimakos describes the inhabitants of the prison as dwelling in 'this true land of mourners'.[46] He explains the reason for yoking these topics at the start of Step 6:

> Every word is preceded by thought. And the remembrance of death and sins precedes weeping and mourning. Therefore, this subject comes in its proper place in this chapter.[47]

At the start of Step 7, he advocates meditation on hell and final judgment as a means to purify the soul's lasciviousness[48] and encourages the mourner to see sleep as prefiguring death, advocating that 'the benefit of eating at table become a reminder for you of the painful table of those worms'.[49] Awareness of death thus becomes a reminder not only of the ephemeral and sensual nature of earthly life, but also inspires terror and grief about the fate that awaits all humanity after death. This practice of remembrance of death, like the physical discipline of fasting, confers benefit through casting the mourner on God's providence, and prompting repentance for the sins for which they will be punished in the life hereafter. Another benefit described in Step 7 is the contemplation of hellfire as a method of ensuring alertness during the reciting of the office.[50] When remembrance of death is externalised into tears of grief because of death and sin, then the mourner has become 'truly impeccable', Klimakos asserts.[51] In other words, when remembrance of death and fear of the day of judgment are expressed by tears and mourning, then spiritual growth is taking place.

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[44] *Step 1*, 4, 633C, Moore (1959) 50, cf. Step 6, 2, 793B, Moore (1959) 110.
[45] *Step 18*, 6, 933D, Moore (1959) 168 and Step 6, 2, 793B, Moore (1959) 110.
[46] *Step 5*, 4, 764D, Moore (1959) 99.
[47] *Step 6*, 1, 793B, Moore (1959) 110.
[48] *Step 7*, 10, 804C, Moore (1959) 114/5.
[49] *Step 7*, 18, 805A, Moore (1959) 115/6, cf. *Step 18*, 4, 933A, Moore (1959) 167.
[50] *Step 7*, 12, 805B, Moore (1959) 116.
[51] *Step 7*, 42, 809A, Moore (1959) 118/9.

Looking at the subject which follows Step 7, it is clear that freedom from anger is not a subject Klimakos often connects to remorse for sin.[52] When he does connect the two, as in the opening of Step 8, it is to assert that spiritual mourning gradually eradicates anger:

> As the gradual pouring of water on a fire completely extinguishes the flame, so the tears of true mourning are able to quench every flame of anger and irritability. Therefore we place this next in order.[53]

In this instance, he thus sees mourning as a necessary precursor in the movement towards freedom from anger. He gives an example of this in Step 7, 54[54] where he claims that the thought of mourning was enough to drive away anger, vanity and gluttony.[55] Anger and mourning are incompatible, so one who displays anger while apparently mourning cannot be sincere in their grief.[56] The incompatibility arises from the fact that one who is angry lacks humility, which is essential for penitence.[57]

Although Klimakos does not dwell on the subject, he clearly values freedom from anger as an important virtue: it is presented as an indication of considerable spiritual maturity, although not the high level of the perfected one described in Step 7, 4.[58] The first stage in acquiring freedom from anger is that the anger is held in check by mourning or tears, the more advanced stage that anger and rancour have been totally dissipated. Again, Klimakos shows a progression from one step of his ladder to another, whilst sustaining a sophisticated awareness that vices and virtues are mutually connected and may not always present in a clear progression from start to finish. He is concerned with defining a process of continual rebirth and renewal, not merely an ultimate state of perfection, so Klimakos presents freedom from anger as being achieved through mourning and

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[52] The two qualities are yoked together in *Step 4*, 55, 705Dff., Moore (1959) 84.
[53] *Step 8*, 1, 828C, Moore (1959) 124. Cf. *Step 5*, 15, 768D, Moore (1959) 101.
[54] 813A/B, Moore (1959) 121.
[55] Note also *Step 7*, 19, 805B, Moore (1959) 116: the memory of judgment day is enough to rout anger and irrational grief, which is to be distinguished from the rational grief of *penthos*.
[56] *Step 7*, 29, 808B, Moore (1959) 117.
[57] *Step 8*, 12, 829B, Moore (1959) 125.
[58] 804A, p. 114, cf. *Step 8*, 26, 833B, Moore (1959) 128, where Klimakos states that 'Freedom from anger in novices as a result of mourning is one thing; the tranquility that is found in the perfect is another. In the former, anger is held in tears as by a bridle; but in the latter it has been mortified by dispassion, as a snake is killed by a sword.' cf. *Step 8*, 27, 833C, Moore (1959) 128.

tears. Its presence indicates some degree of success in the campaign against the world's sins. Being afflicted by these, or any of the vices or virtues, is not a static state. The propensity for sin remains and needs continual spiritual effort to be kept under control. This is a process not so much of permanent eradication but regular weeding. Similarly, the connection between remembrance of death and mourning is not simply one of cause and effect. Rather, the mourner will naturally be drawn by the former into the condition of grief and mourning, which in turn will heighten the mourner's awareness of the inescapability of their final end, and promote repentance. The spiritual conditions Klimakos describes are mutually sustaining.

The next stage in exegeting Step 7 is to look at the title, *Περὶ τοῦ χαροποιοῦ πένθους*, which may be translated as 'Concerning joy-inducing mourning'. Moore translates it as 'On mourning which causes joy', and Miller 'On joy-making mourning'.[59] Luibheid and Russell translate it as 'Mourning'.[60] Klimakos sees the two conditions of joy and grief as mutually sustaining, telling us that godly sorrow produces joy.[61] However, elsewhere he sees the two occurring simultaneously, as 'even a commingling with God, by means of the water of genuine sorrow'.[62] He asserts that mourning and joy are mingled, 'like honey in a honeycomb'.[63] This image may be drawn from Psalm 19.9–10, where the judgments of the Lord are 'sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb'.

This apparently contradictory state is one of the most puzzling aspects of *penthos*. Chryssavgis studies this in his work on Klimakos.[64] Mourning is so strongly connected to fear of death and judgment, it seems to be the companion of fear rather than joy. In its renunciation of all laughter[65] it suggests a lack of joy, but Klimakos believes that holy fear can lead to holy joy: 'Tears shed from fear interecede

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[59] Moore (1959) 113, and Miller (1991) 70.

[60] (1982) 136.

[61] Cf. Chrysostom, *In Ep. ad Phil. 14*, PG 62, 281f., 'Now this joy is not contrary to that mourning; it is even born from it . . . it is possible to be mourning for one's own sins and in joy because of Christ.' quoted Hausherr (1984) 140.

[62] *Step 25*, 6, 989D, Moore (1959) 192.

[63] *Step 7*, 49, 812A, Moore (1959) 120 cf. Nilus, *Letter 1*, 220, PG 79, 164 'Lamentation over one's sins brings a very sweet sadness and a bitterness which tastes like honey, being seasoned with a marvellous hope.'quoted Hausherr (1984) 141.

[64] See especially the section on 'the stages of tears' in his paper 'A Spirituality of Imperfection: the Way of Tears in St John Climacus' (2002).

[65] See Hausherr (1984) 94ff. for an exposition and an anthology of texts concerning this issue.

for us; but tears of all-holy love show that our prayer has been accepted'.[66] In mourning, as in fasting, the absence of physical and world comforts throws the mourner back onto God, and enhances an awareness of God's mercies and His wisdom in inflicting trials on his creature. In Step 5, 38, Klimakos describes how the truly repentant understand that they deserve tribulation and that to despair of God's mercy is suicide:[67] the true mourner will find spiritual joy. In contradistinction to the facile pleasure of earthly laughter, 'He who is clothed in blessed and graciously-given mourning, as in a bridal garment, [he] knows the spiritual laughter of the soul'.[68] Such spiritual mourners have discernment which enables them to be moved by any music to 'holy gaiety, to divine love and to tears'.[69] He also states that people should mourn 'not because of their heart's pain, but rather should rejoice in spiritual laughter, out of love for Him'.[70] In other words, mourning leads to joy,[71] which then leads again to mourning in a process of continual repentance and restoration: remembrance of death producing tears, which produce fear, which begets fearlessness leading to joy and holy love.[72] The perennial cycle of repentance and mourning is stressed: Klimakos tells us that fallen mourners are more blessed than those who have not fallen and are not mourning.[73] Mourning must be continual and repeated because so likewise is human sinfulness. The joy arises out of a sense that through mourning the truly penitent is moving closer to God.[74]

Having looked at the context of Step 7, and its title, it is now possible to examine in detail the structure and content of this text. In so doing, it is important to balance the authority of the text itself with the redactional activity, which, from the earliest time, seeks to systematize and label such texts. The text is broken down, by modern translators, although not Migne, into 70 sections. Whilst certain themes and concerns recur, there is no obvious shaping of his material within Step 7 into consecutive, dependent sections, and some of the

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[66] *Step 7*, 7, 804B, Moore (1959) 114.
[67] 708B, Moore (1959) 109.
[68] *Step 7*, 40, 809A, Moore (1959) 118.
[69] *Step 15*, 61, 893A, Moore (1959) 155.
[70] *Step 7*, 45, 908C, Moore (1959) 118.
[71] Cf. *Step 1*, 16, 637C, Moore (1959) 53: labour and grief are at the start of the process which leads to 'joy and eagerness, love and holy fire.'
[72] Cf. *Step 7*, 56, 813B, Moore (1959) 121/2.
[73] *Step 5*, 26, 776D, Moore (1959) 106.
[74] Cf. Abba Isaiah, *Logos 16*, quoted Hausherr (1982) 141.

divisions seem rather arbitrary. Klimakos jumps from one issue and genre to another, with similar material being separated by diverse thoughts. Certain repeated themes emerge, but within Step 7 itself, as already mentioned, there is not much evidence of a ladder-like structure compared to that found in the text as a whole. Rather, this part of the text treats, in greater detail, particular aspects of spiritual growth of concern to Klimakos, so exegeting this section of his text follows his lead, assessing the material not systematically section by section, but in groups of themes and divisions of genre.

The first obvious aspect of Step 7 is a collection of definitions, and this is therefore the starting point for an assessment of the text. Klimakos also expounds a number of what may be termed 'definitions by default', in other words, outlining what is incompatible with mourning. He then considers some of the aids and hindrances to mourning. He also gives warnings and injunctions, and positive exhortations and encouragement. These statements are not precisely definitions: some are rhetorical and pithy, like Proverbs; others are more extended and analytical, discussing the nature of the process of spiritual grieving. There are also anecdotes, which illustrate some of his points. These various aspects of his material may be presented in isolation, or in clusters. Finally, there is a substantial amount of extended analysis of *penthos*, which focuses on six recurring themes.

Definitions of Penthos

Sections 1–3 of Step 7 give definitions, of increasing brevity, of mourning, compunction, confession and repentance. The definitions of confession and repentance are only touched on briefly, and do not recur as major themes after the opening sections. Definitions of mourning are also found in sections 52 and 60. All of these use the construct 'Mourning is . . .'. Klimakos tells us that mourning is the soul's grief, a golden spur in a purified soul,[75] the sorrow of a soul on fire,[76] the pain of a repentant soul.[77] There are also descriptive definitions of mourning in section 28, which employs the metaphor

[75] *Step 7*, 1, 801C/D, Moore (1959) 113.
[76] *Step 7*, 52, 813A, Moore (1959) 121.
[77] *Step 7*, 60, 813D, Moore (1959) 122.

of enmity to one's own body,[78] and 40,[79] which describes *penthos* as 'a bridal garment'. Compunction is initially defined in section 2 as 'the eternal torture of the consciousness' and is defined again in section 27[80] in terms which link it to remembrance of death. Klimakos does not suggest that compunction precedes mourning, rather that the two are different words to describe the whole process of spiritual awakening to remorse. As Chryssavgis states:

> Climacus uses his customary aphoristic, apophthegmatic language, and compunction, *penthos* and the gift of tears often coinhere, although the basic distinction between them is recognisable.[81]

The distinction may be defined as one wherein compunction focuses the spiritual grief, and transforms it into a workable tool; it 'dowses the fire of the wandering heart through intellectual confession'[82] and 'hourly imagines its (the soul's) release'.[83] Both compunction and mourning are seen as the pain of a soul under assault from the conscience. Both terms define a process of yearning and physical movement towards a greater good. Mourning ploughs the soil of the soul, preparing it for the seed of 'blessed dispassion'.[84] In contradistinction to, say, mourning the loss of a person, Klimakos' understanding of mourning only rarely refers specifically to something which has been lost,[85] rather it is expressed as a yearning for something which is anxiously sought. It is 'the natural disposition of a sorrowful heart, continually seeking that for which it thirsts . . . it diligently pursues its aim'.[86]

This sense of yearning stresses that *penthos* is about gain as well as loss. There is the pain of the woman in labour in this mourning[87] but also reward, both from *katanuxis* and *penthos*. Through compunction, the soul receives the comfort God gives to humble monks,

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[78] *Step 7*, 28, 808B, Moore (1959) 117.
[79] *Step 7*, 40, 809A, Moore (1959) 118.
[80] *Step 7*, 27, 808A, Moore (1959) 117.
[81] 1985(i) 131.
[82] *Step 7*, 2, 801D, Moore (1959) 114.
[83] *Step 7*, 27, 808A, Moore (1959) 117.
[84] *Step 7*, 53, 813A, Moore (1959) 121.
[85] Note *Step 7*, 59, 813C, Moore (1959) 121. Klimakos gives a typically humane and everyday example to illustrate his point, describing the mingled joy and grief of a child reunited with its parent.
[86] *Step 7*, 1, 801D, my own translation.
[87] *Step 7*, 60, 813D, Moore (1959) 122.

just like the refreshment of cool water.[88] He who wears the bridal garment of *penthos* knows 'the spiritual laughter of the soul'.[89]

Penthos is also defined and located according to what it is not and where it will not be found. Such definitions may be found in Sections 8, 24, 29/30, 38, 44, 54 and 60. These tell us that mourning is incompatible with laughter,[90] theology,[91] tears which arise from anger or conceit,[92] feasting,[93] and luxury, glory, anger or irritability.[94] The laughter which is condemned is clearly distinguished from the 'spiritual laughter of the soul' and refers to the more earthly pleasure, against which the desert fathers were very fixed, in other words laughter which attends gossip, loquacity and frivolity, rather than the joyful overflowing of the pure heart in adoration of God. Klimakos urges his reader to 'Be like a king in your heart, seated high up in humility, and commanding laughter; "Go", and it goes, and of sweet weeping, "Come", and it comes'.[95]

The incompatibility of spiritual grief with pride, anger, and indulgence of the body is self-evident. Klimakos' dismissal of theologians needs closer examination:

> Theology does not fit with mourning, for it naturally separates one from mourning. For the theologian is like one seated on the teacher's chair, whereas the one who mourns is as if he spends his time in dung and sackcloth. And that, it seems to me, is why David—and he is a wise man and a teacher—replied to those who asked him when he was mourning; "How shall I sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"—that is, that of the passions.[96]

The first two sentences are relatively clear: mourning is the product of a humbled spirit rather than one which sets itself up as an authority, or delves too much into mysteries. But why does the activity of a 'theologian' belong to the land 'of the passions', as suggested by the last sentence? Hausherr's refutation of Klimakos as 'theologian', discussed above in connection with the title *skolastikos*, suggests a desire

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[88] *Step 7*, 27, 808A, Moore (1959) 117.
[89] *Step 7*, 40, 809A, Moore (1959) 118, cf. Step 7, 45, 809C, Moore (1959) 118.
[90] *Step 7*, 8, 804B, Moore (1959) 114.
[91] *Step 7*, 24, 805C, Moore (1959) 116.
[92] *Step 7*, 29/30, 808B, Moore (1959) 117 and 44, 809B, Moore (1959) 119, and 54, 813A/B, Moore (1959) 121.
[93] *Step 7*, 38, 808D, Moore (1959) 118.
[94] *Step 7*, 60, 813D, Moore (1959) 122.
[95] Note *Step 7*, 39, 808D, Moore (1959) 118.
[96] *Step 7*, 24, 805C, Moore (1959) 116.

on his part to disassociate Klimakos from 'one seated on the teacher's seat.' Within its context, this comment must be interpreted as meaning that knowledge divorced from practical experience was worth little, and even risked being prompted by unhelpful intellectual passions, such as a desire for the power knowledge might confer, and the admiration of others. In other words, to be a theologian of this sort—rather then the Evagrian definition of a theologian as one who prays—is to be prey to the sins of vanity and vainglory. Thus, *penthos* may not be found in proximity to any of the seven or eight chief sins or failings, be they physical, spiritual or intellectual, since all these 'passions' are alien to God's kingdom. Klimakos here juggles his experience of being a monk with his role as author. It is the former which validates the latter, and as teacher he warns his readers not to assume the mantle of authority until they, too, have empirical knowledge.

To sum up, Klimakos defines *penthos* as the remorseful consciousness of the penitent soul which drives it towards God. It is not cleanly separated from compunction. It is part of the continual process of repentance and conversion, and in particular denotes the painful awakening of the conscience. As the soul moves away from sin, the continuing impetus of *penthos* opens up the possibility of rejoicing in God's saving mercy. In this journey towards salvation, there will be both hindrances and aids. While Klimakos does not state an intention to set out prescriptive patterns of behaviour, a significant proportion of *Step 7* outlines the mental qualities and emotional experiences likely to lead to, or detract, from mourning. As he states, 'There are materials which dry the fountains (of our tears) and there are others which give birth to mud and reptiles in them'.[97]

Of these, the one Klimakos stresses most is the remembrance of death and specifically the day of judgment, which are mentioned in Sections 18, 19, and 21. Remembrance of death will not only produce mourning,[98] but will curb self-indulgence[99] and aid alertness during psalmody.[100] It should not just constitute a mental discipline, but have a physical manifestation, too: Klimakos advocates the wearing of black to encourage mourning.[101] There are specific references

[97] *Step 7*, 67, 816B, Moore (1959) 123.
[98] 'In the opinion of many of the Fathers', *Step* 7, 32, 808B, Moore (1959) 117.
[99] *Step 7*, 18, 805A, Moore (1959) 116.
[100] *Step 7*, 21, 805B, Moore (1959) 116.
[101] *Step 7*, 22, 805C, Moore (1959) 116.

to the Judge of all in these sections, and it is significant that elsewhere Klimakos refers to God as 'Our good and just judge'.[102] He therefore plants in his reader's mind the possibility that whilst they should fear the day of judgment, and it should prompt them to fear and repentance, the role of the judge is to weigh merits as well as defects. Through mourning, the soul may be so purified that it has nothing to fear on the Final Day. Other practices conducive to mourning are 'groans and dejection',[103] provided they do not arise out of the pride of a frivolous person,[104] silence, and thoughtful compunction.[105]

Klimakos mentions only briefly various stumbling blocks to mourning, such as vainglory,[106] noise, self-indulgence of the body, and loquacity,[107] singing[108] and the expectation of happiness, urging his reader to 'Drive away, by the hand of humility, the dwelling place of joy'.[109] In addition to outlining some general habits to follow or avoid, Klimakos scatters throughout *Step 7* a number of injunctions and warnings about spiritual development in general. They are balanced and accompanied by exhortations and encouragement. The torments of hell and the everlasting fire, mentioned above in the context of remembrance of death, are a dominant theme in Klimakos' warnings. The 'merciless inquisition' experienced by a most patently holy hermit is described vividly as the main theme of the only extended anecdote in *Step 7*.[110] The reader is urged to recall the dreadful fate which awaits the impenitent, because experiencing such pain has a purifying effect upon the errant soul.[111] When fear of death and judgment are externalised into visible trembling and tears, the integrity of mind and body mourning together obtains mercy from 'the judge'.[112] Another recurring injunction is for consistency

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[102] *Step 7*, 23, 805C, Moore (1959) 116.
[103] *Step 7*, 7, 804B, Moore (1959) 114.
[104] *Step 7*, 47, 809C/D, Moore (1959) 119.
[105] *Step 7*, 61, 813D, Moore (1959) 122.
[106] *Step 7*, 34, 808C, Moore (1959) 118.
[107] *Step 7*, 5, 804A/B, Moore (1959) 114.
[108] *Step 7*, 52, 813A, Moore (1959) 121. See Gale (1985) 20. He corroborates Chitty's comments on appropriate styles of hymnody employed in monastic life in Sinai during the 6th century, suggesting that this practice would have been known to Klimakos.
[109] *Step 7*, 57, 813C, Moore (1959) 122.
[110] Section 50, 812A, Moore (1959) 120/1.
[111] *Step 7*, 10, 804C, Moore (1959) 114/5, cf. Scholia 25 by Isaac, PG 828B, which lists as the three virtues to preserve mourning, lamenting one's sin and having always before oneself one's own death.
[112] *Step 7*, 11, 804D, Moore (1959) 115.

of behaviour,[113] valued because penitence and grief are a continual process, and even when their fruits are seen, perpetual work is required to maintain them. Even beyond death, it is important to 'Hold fast to the blessed joy-grief of holy compunction, and do not cease working at it even until you are raised up from hence and placed, spotless, beside Christ'.[114]

Klimakos also advocates discernment. He warns against trusting tears which fall 'before you have achieved purification'[115] and makes several references to the deception of false tears. It is only, he says, at the end of life that it is possible to understand the value of one's tears.[116] The passages of warning and injunctions are longer than the encouraging passages, which sometimes occur like light at the end of a tunnel, such as in *Step 7*, 20, when in the middle of a dark passage describing the terrors of hell and judgment, Klimakos writes:

> The sea wastes with time, as Job says. And likewise with time and patience, little by little, these things of which we have spoken will come and be perfected in us.[117]

Examination of the nature of Klimakos' exhortations to his reader shows that they at times punctuate a passage of considerable analytical complexity. The words of encouragement he offers are expressed in conspicuously briefer terms than the warnings and instructions. They may be relatively impersonal, such as *Step 7*, 15: 'Become deep in thought, without delighting in it, withdrawn into your own heart. For the demons fear focused thought just as thieves do dogs'.[118] Other exhortations, (such as that in *Step 7*, 45), are warmer in tone, and address his reader more directly. This passage also suggests that, like the discipline offered by a loving human parent, the criticism is intended to help the process of growth. In this passage, he emphasises that God desires our mourning not 'from sorrow of heart, but rather that out of love for Him he should rejoice with spiritual laughter. Remove sin, and the tear of sorrow is superfluous for your eyes of sense'.[119]

Overall, there are more warnings than encouragement. Yet Klimakos

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[113] *Step 7*, 13, 14, 804D, Moore (1959) 115.
[114] *Step 7*, 9, 804B, Moore (1959) 114.
[115] *Step 7*, 35, 808C, Moore (1959) 118.
[116] *Step 7*, 36, 808D, Moore (1959) 118.
[117] 805B, Moore (1959) 116.
[118] 805A, Moore (1959) 115.
[119] 809C, Moore (1959) 119.

reads as a man of great compassion and humanity. He focuses on God's love, so warnings about how to conduct one's life are based on the divine desire to rescue fallen humanity. The summit of Klimakos's ladder is love, the greatest of the virtues, 'for God Himself is so called'.[120] Exhortations and warnings are to be read in the context of Klimakos's understanding of theosis as more than a continuous progression from one state to another. He understands that fallen humanity will continue to fall, despite making progress on the spiritual path, hence the continual need for repentance and mourning for sin. He is explicit about this:

> I consider those fallen mourners more blessed than those who have not fallen and are not mourning over themselves; because as a result of their fall, they have risen by a sure resurrection.[121]

For Klimakos, the need for continual repentance, demonstrated by a sense of mourning and tears, lies at the heart of the spiritual journey. It is not a quality reserved for beginners, although it is necessary to acquire it early on in order to progress. The penitent who has heeded his warnings and accepted the charism of weeping is open to the highest Christian mystical insights, and may attain the grace of the final step on the ladder, namely the presence of God.

Klimakos's humanity is demonstrated, at a literary level, by his vivid and graphic choice of imagery. He is, however, far more than a gifted wordsmith. *Step 7* contains much detailed analysis of the nature of repentant grief, which reveals an extremely shrewd and wise understanding of what the modern world might term psychology, and the ancient Christian world sees as spiritual maturity. Through this, Klimakos reveals the highest level of understanding of how penitent grief repristinates the image of God in his fallen creature.

More than a quarter of the sections of *Step 7* involve extended analysis of the nature of repentant grief. In other words, Klimakos goes beyond describing or advocating a virtue or ascetic practice, to a deeper level of explanation about the nature of that quality and how the human psyche and heart can engage with it. The great strength of Klimakos' writing is his profound sensitivity to the question of how the human person can travel from fallenness to perfection. He holds in tension both great confidence in the potential of

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[120] *Step 30*, 1, 1156C, Moore (1959) 262.
[121] *Step 5*, 26, 776B, Moore (1959) 106.

a penitent who is really willing to change, and a sharp realism about human nature. Klimakos both addresses, and writes about, humanity rather than some superhuman construct. It is in the analytical parts of *Step 7* that the bulk of Klimakos' teachings on *penthos* may be found. There are six recurring themes, which will be considered in turn: purifying tears and baptism, the dynamic between fear of God and holy love, the spiritual laughter of the soul, that tears can be perceived within a hierarchy of spiritual growth, that mourning must integrate all aspects of each individual and finally the mutually sustaining tension between human endeavour and God's grace.

Purifying Tears and Baptism

In writing about penitential tears as a form of baptism, Klimakos contributes to an established tradition. Gregory Nazianzen's *Oration 39.17* may be the source here; subsequently John of Damascus places baptism of penance and tears sixth in a list of eight types of baptism[122] and Symeon the New Theologian, who directly mentions reading *The Ladder*, continues and refines the tradition. The idea of tears being generally cleansing is of course not unique to Klimakos: he himself notes that 'the Fathers have laid down that . . . honest tears are a bath',[123] and they in turn no doubt borrowed and developed their teaching from Jewish purification rites. Klimakos acknowledges that some individuals may be more disposed to weep copiously than others: the cleansing effect of tears may occur through the very feeling of sorrow and heaviness of heart, even if tears are absent, he claims.[124] In emphasising the purity associated with weeping, Klimakos prefigures Symeon the New Theologian, as Hausherr notes.[125] Throughout Step 7, there are brief references to the purifying power of tears,[126] and there are other references elsewhere in the text, for

[122] *De Fide Orthodoxa*, Book 4, 9, PG 120 (1864), 1124C. Scholion 3 on *Step 7* by Syncletica, PG 88, 820A describes repentance as a third birth after those from the womb and through holy baptism.

[123] *Step 4*, 8, 681A, Moore (1959) 68; cf. Step 26, 168, 1072A, Moore (1959) 227/8.

[124] *Step 26*, 45, 1088D, Moore (1959) 234.

[125] (1987) 388.

[126] 31, 808B, Moore (1959) 117; section 10, 804C, Moore (1959) 114/5 notes that one of the benefits of remembering hellfire is that it purges 'the lasciviousness existing in our soul' and replaces it with 'incorruptible purity'; see also *Step 7*, 33, 808C, Moore (1959) 118.

example: 'As writing is washed out by water, so sins can be washed out by tears'.[127]

Klimakos asserts that the pure heart is of greater value than 'public greatness'.[128] Without purity of intent in pursuing 'silence and thoughtful compunction', mourning cannot be retained.[129] He shares this conviction with Hesychios the Priest, whose text *On Watchfulness and Holiness* shows evidence of Klimakos' teachings.[130] In two places however, Klimakos does more than mention the cleansing power of tears and specifically mentions the relative merits of tears and baptism.[131] He asserts that it is 'essential, really essential'[132] to cleanse away sins committed *after* baptism; in other words, baptism does not guarantee a permanent state of purity of heart. It 'purges us of the evil that was already established in us' but 'The fountain of tears established after baptism is greater than baptism itself',[133] because it washes out subsequent stains of sin.

Klimakos makes a number of other points in his comments on baptism, and to understand them we need to look at the main passage in Step 7 which deals with this:

> Greater than baptism itself is the fountain of tears after baptism, even though it is somewhat audacious to say so. For baptism is the washing away of evils that were in us before, but sins committed after baptism are washed away by tears. As baptism is received in infancy, we have all defiled it, but we cleanse it anew with tears. And if God in His love for mankind had not given us tears, few indeed and hard to find would be those in a state of grace.[134]

Here Klimakos both acknowledges the enduring fallenness of the human condition (that men and women will continue to commit sin even after baptism) and suggests the remedy for it (continual tears and penitence) He understands that the gracious gift of baptism makes people partakers of God's kingdom but also confers responsibility for stewarding that gift. God's mercy must be met by human faithfulness,

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[127] *Step 26*, brief summary no. 44, 1088D, Moore (1959) 234.
[128] *Step 7*, 64, 816A, Moore (1959) 122/3.
[129] *Step 7*, 61, 813D, Moore (1959) 122.
[130] Hesychios states that purity of heart will lead to 'joy, hopefulness, compunction, sorrow, tears, an understanding of ourselves and of our sins, mindfulness of death'. PG 93, 1516, trans *Philokalia* vol. 1, 181.
[131] *Step 7*, 6, 804B, Moore (1959) 114 and 64, 816A, Moore (1959) 122/3.
[132] *Step 7*, 64, 816A, Moore (1959) 122/3.
[133] *Step 7*, 6, 804B, Moore (1959) 114.
[134] *Step 7*, 6, 804A, Moore (1959) 114.

expressed through penitent tears, another gracious charism, which *in conjunction with baptism* assures salvation. As he says, without tears, which God in his mercy granted, few could be saved. Klimakos is suggesting here that baptism is the moment of *katanuxis* which pricks the soul into a state of *penthos*. The purification brought about by 'cleansing and guileless tears'[135] is not a static condition but one which causes the soul to 'move from passions to passionlessness'.[136] It is a movement from initial fear of God's retribution towards love for God, and acceptance of his judgment. This is another key issue for Klimakos.

Fear and Love of God

Fear of God is frequently cited in the tradition as a cause of mourning and penitent tears.[137] One instance is Diadokos, *On Spiritual Knowledge* no. 87,[138] where he states that confession to the Lord makes it possible to progress to tears of love and gratitude for forgivenes. Klimakos himself gives advice on this in his section on vainglory, where he advises 'when out of vainglory we decide upon a certain course of action, we should remember our mourning and should think of the holy fear with which we stood before God in solitary prayer'.[139] He mentions fear of God four times in Step 7.[140] On each occasion, it is in conjunction with love of God. The fear precedes the love: awe of God leads to love of Him and others: the first great commandment thus leads directly to the second. Such fear is inspired by thoughts of judgment. Tears which arise purely from fear 'intercede for us'[141] and afford protection.[142] However, through a gracious paradox, 'when fear begets fearlessness, joy is revealed. And when joy is indissolubly obtained, holy love blossoms'.[143]

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[135] *Step 7*, 33, 808C, Moore (1959) 118.
[136] *Step 7*, 33, 808C, Moore (1959) 118.
[137] Hausherr (1982) 34–35 lists some examples.
[138] *Philokalia* vol. 1, 286/7.
[139] *Step 22*, 41, 956C, Moore (1959) 178.
[140] *Step 7*, 7, 804, Moore (1959) 114; *Step 7*, 33, 808C, Moore (1959) 118, *Step 7*, 56, 813B, Moore (1959) 121/2, and *Step 7*, 66, 816B, Moore (1959) 123.
[141] *Step 7*, 7, 804B, Moore (1959) 114.
[142] *Step 7*, 66, 816B, Moore (1959) 123.
[143] *Step 7*, 56, 813B, Moore (1959) 121.

The realisation that the supplication has been accepted and gratitude at this recognition enables the penitent to experience 'holy love'.[144] Klimakos is aware of the fragility of this movement from fear to love; the tears are 'easily lost', a phrase he uses elsewhere in Step 7.[145] This response of love is superior to that of fear, although it requires fear. It is God's wish that 'men mourn (not) because of their heart's pain, but rather should rejoice in spiritual laughter, out of love for Him'.[146]

A careful reading of his text therefore discloses Klimakos as being fundamentally aware of the mercy and compassion of God in enabling the spiritual experience of mourning. It is not a punitive exercise, nor a purely negative state. The mourning described is a sense of remorse rather than a sense of loss. Both Hausherr and McGuckin find in Klimakos' emphasis on God's love a new perspective. Hausherr talks of a 'theology of love' in Klimakos, and he considers that *The Ladder* starts and ends in love of God, which is a driving force in Klimakos' understanding of monastic love.[147] McGuckin places Klimakos within a wider overall tradition, and in particular comments on Klimakos' response to predecessors in the desert tradition:

> In placing Love as the highest step in the ascent, John of Sinai was intending to correct the highly intellectual tradition of Evagrius which had enjoyed a strong vogue in earlier periods of Christian desert spirituality.[148]

It is important to remember, however, that Klimakos' writings on the love of God are accompanied by warnings: 'He who wishes to speak about divine love undertakes to speak about God. But it is precarious to expatiate on God, and may even be dangerous for the unwary'.[149] The penitent, Klimakos urges, should always be aware of the coinherence of holy love and holy fear.[150] Where the two occur, the human quality of laughter is purified into an acceptable spiritual state, which needs some further explanation.

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[144] *Step 7*, 7, 804C, Moore (1959) 114.
[145] Section 5, 804A/B, Moore (1959) 114.
[146] *Step 7*, 45, 809C, Moore (1959) 119.
[147] (1987) 384/5 and 395.
[148] Entry on Klimakos in *Encyclopedia of Greece and the Hellenic Tradition*, ed Speake (2000).
[149] *Step 30*, 4, 1156A, Moore (1959) 262.
[150] *Step 30*, 17, 1157C, Moore (1959) 263/4.

Spiritual Laughter

The apparently paradoxical title of this step of Klimakos' treatise has already been mentioned, as has the Fathers' repugnance for frivolous laughter. In Step 7, and in Scholia 5,[151] there are several references to spiritual laughter,[152] which is seen as that of the pure soul. It arises from being clothed in the 'bridal garment' of 'blessed and graciously-given mourning'[153] rather than the sullied rags of the world's concerns. It is God's desire that his creatures will experience this, and it will happen when both sin and grief are at an end.[154] Klimakos identifies such freedom from tears and sorrow with that described in Revelation 7.17, and it is probably the same text that inspires Klimakos to use bridegroom imagery at this point, since this occurs frequently in Revelation.[155] The image of bridal joy suggests the ultimate restoration of union with the Godhead. Matthew's gospel portrays the kingdom of heaven as being like a wedding feast to which only those who are appropriately clad may approach. The strongly paradoxical image of being clad in mourning as a bridal robe is found in *Περί πένθους*, Homily 90 of the *Πανδέκτης τῆς ἁγίας γραφῆς* by Klimakos' near contemporary in Mar Saba, Antiochos the Monk.[156]

Klimakos is explicit that the spiritual laughter which comes to the blessed mourner is the same state of freedom from pain and grief which was Adam's before he fell: 'Before his fall, Adam has no tears, just as after the resurrection when no sin will remain, truly, all pain, sorrow and sighing will depart then'.[157] To mourn for sin, therefore, is the way to restore the innocence of God's original creation. Mourning effects an ontological change in the individual who mourns, and also demonstrates the extent to which healing and spiritual maturation have taken place.

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[151] 820B.
[152] Section 40, 809A, Moore (1959) 118 and 45, 809C, Moore (1959) 119.
[153] *Step 7*, 40, 809A, Moore (1959) 118.
[154] *Step 7*, 45, 809C, Moore (1959) 119.
[155] 18, 23; 21.2; 21.9; 22.17.
[156] PG 89, 1709ff. The insitence on the imminence of the bridegroom's return and the plethora of prophetic citation lend an eschatalogical subtext to Antiochos' work.
[157] *Step 7*, 45, 809C, Moore (1959) 119.

Tears as an Indication of Spiritual Growth

Other writers in the desert tradition, such as Diadokos of Photike,[158] refer to tears as being the prerogative of those advanced in humility. Klimakos's teachings on this are quite subtle, and cannot be confined to one single viewpoint. The first point he makes in *Step 7*, after the definitions with which he opens, is that there are different stages of progress to be observed in the acquisition of 'blessed penthos',[159] each represented by characteristic behaviour. The early stages of mourning are fragile and easily destroyed:[160] with beginners, it is especially hard to determine the source and nature of their tears:

> Many of the Fathers say that the question of tears, especially in the case of beginners, is an obscure matter and hard to ascertain, as tears are born in many different ways. For instance, there are tears from nature, from God, from adverse suffering, from praiseworthy suffering, from vainglory, from licentiousness, from love, from the remembrance of death, and from many other causes.[161]

Elsewhere, he repeats that tears may derive from faults and not true penitence; pride and vainglory are especially implicated.[162] In other words, the mere presence of tears does not necessarily indicate spiritual advancement. The underlying condition of the heart, and the presence of remorse and penitence are what determine the holiness of the tears.

The varied genesis of tears leads to the possibility of an interchange between different types of tears. Since mourning is a continual process, it is 'no wonder' if 'the beginning of mourning may be good tears and the end bad tears'.[163] Here he suggests that mourning is a continual, but not a static, process; there is scope for backsliding as well as advancement, and until discernment has been granted, the would-be mourner may be simultaneously mourning and sinful.[164] This is a different understanding of the matter from that of, for example, Diadokos of Photike, who describes a 'godly sorrow and tears

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[158] *On Spiritual Knowledge*, 37, SC 5 (1966), trans *Philokalia*, vol. 1, 264.
[159] *Step 7*, 4, 804A, Moore (1959) 114. Cf. Step 25, 6, 989D, Moore (1959) 192, where Klimakos refers to 'beginners'.
[160] *Step 7*, 5, 804A/B, Moore (1959) 114.
[161] *Step 7*, 32, 808B, Moore (1959) 117.
[162] *Step 7*, 47, 809C/D, Moore (1959) 119 and section 32, 808B, Moore (1959) 117.
[163] *Step 7*, 34, 808C, Moore (1959) 118.
[164] *Step 7*, 26, 808A, Moore (1959) 117.

unaccompanied by grief' as being located between the two joys of initiation and perfection.[165] In acknowledging this, Klimakos reveals his compassion for, and realism about, his fellow monks.[166] He exhorts his reader to remember that consistency and perseverance, the hallmarks of asceticism, are necessary in order to build on the early stages of mourning: 'Practice produces habit, and perseverance grows into a feeling of the heart; and what is done with an ingrained feeling of the heart is not easily eradicated'.[167] Elsewhere in his text, he affirms the need for consistency, claiming that 'the soul that now laughs, now mourns, now lives in luxury, can make no progress'.[168]

Klimakos urges caution about trusting too much in tears produced during the early stages of mourning,[169] using the image of young wine which might well be particularly appropriate for the enthusiastic monastic who has only recently left the world. He knows that there is an appropriate time for all things, and God's grace must be accepted in revealing the proper *kairos* for tears as for all else.[170] Mourning cannot be merely the result of one's determined effort, but should be accepted as a gracious gift; indeed the decision to mourn 'does not have the beauty of mourning' itself[171] because it has not been fully internalised. Spiritual grief must, argues Klimakos, be the labour of body and soul, within the context of the way of life followed by each mourner. Mourning has not only to involve all aspects of the human being, but helps provide a coherent and authentic experience of the spiritual life.

The Integration of the Whole Person in the Process of Mourning

Klimakos writes for a collection of individuals within a community. He understands that different personalities are involved, and anyone who mourns must do so with their whole self, neglecting neither physical nor spiritual attributes, and being true to themselves. He

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[165] *On Spiritual Knowledge*, no. 6, trans *Philokalia*, vol. 1, 271.
[166] See *Step 5*, 26, 776B, Moore (1959) 106 cited in footnotes above.
[167] *Step 7*, 63, 816A, Moore (1959) 122. See also *Step 7*, 63, 816A, Moore (1959) 122, for the virtues of constant repetition.
[168] Cf *Step 26*, 39, 1088C, Moore (1959) 233.
[169] *Step 7*, 35, 808C, Moore (1959) 118.
[170] *Step 26*, 87, 1069B, Moore (1959) 214.
[171] *Step 7*, 26, 808A, Moore (1959) 117.

demonstrates this by addressing the issue of how easily repentant tears should flow. The answer is, simply 'according to the strength of our nature. For I have seen small tear drops shed with pain like drops of blood, and fountains painlessly poured out'.[172] Similarly, the heartfelt but inarticulate plea from 'poor men who work for their living' incurs God's compassion more than the clever words of articulate, educated people.[173] You do not need to know that you are mourning to be mourning:[174] sincerity and purity of heart is of greater weight than intelligent speculation or sophisticated insight. One of Klimakos' chief contributions to an understanding of the theology of tears is this insistence that every aspect of the person, and their own particular personality, must be laid before God. This integral approach, and the universal application to both monastic and other people, accounts for the high regard with which he is held in the Orthodox world, according to Brianchaninov,[175] and maintains the integrity of personhood implicit throughout the Eastern Christian understanding of anthropology.

Because of this, Klimakos feels it is essential that the mourner brings every aspect of themselves to this spiritual practice; they should wear mourning, so that their outer appearance reflects their inner state.[176] The mourner should physically tremble 'just like the accused surrounded by the judge, so that both your outward demeanour and what is inside you may extinguish the judgment of the judge'.[177] If mourning is internalised as well as being expressed outwardly, then any place becomes appropriate to mourning, and the habit is secure, because no time needs to be wasted 'discussing places and manners'.[178] Klimakos stresses the fact that there is great merit in the outward expression of what is felt. In other words, the physical tears which spring from the spiritual state are important, provided they are sincere. Indeed, it is 'the living tears from the eye of his senses' which demonstrate true impeccability, a condition which is more advanced than the blessedness of 'the monk who contemplates spiritual powers with the eyes of his soul'.[179] He commends those whose mourning

[172] *Step 7*, 23, 805C, Moore (1959) 116.
[173] *Step 7*, 43, 809B, Moore (1959) 116.
[174] *Step 7*, 46, 809C, Moore (1959) 119.
[175] (1978) passing references throughout the paper.
[176] *Step 7*, 22, 805C, Moore (1959) 116, and *Step 7*, 11, 804C, Moore (1959) 115.
[177] *Step 7*, 11, 804D, Moore (1959) 115.
[178] *Step 7*, 12, 804D, Moore (1959) 115.
[179] *Step 7*, 42, 809A, Moore (1959) 118/9.

is 'in the senses of the heart',[180] because this indicates the sincerity or heartfeltness of their emotion.

So, according to Klimakos, mourning must be both inwardly felt and outwardly expressed. It must include the action of the mind as well as the heart. No part of the human person should be excluded from this process. The process of penitential grief, for Klimakos, must take account of the propensities and intention behind the action, because the validity of tears depends not on their frequency or copiousness but on their sincerity. For example, he states that the tears which flow from penitent grief are not irrational, being 'born from the mind's thought, and the father of thoughts is a rational mind'.[181] Klimakos understands that the movement of repentance in the human person is a complex and inconsistent one, because of the legacy of Adam's fall. The active commitment of the whole person is not sufficient to produce tears. Human desires, however worthy, require the synergy of God's healing power in order to effect transformation. Again, we see Klimakos emphasising God's love, and in particular his grace in the economy of salvation. This synergy of human and divine labours is characteristic of desert teaching, and clearly articulated in Klimakos' teaching.

Human Endeavour and God's Grace

In Step 7, sections 25 and 26,[182] Klimakos commends particularly the value of tears which are not just the result of human zeal and deliberation. When weeping is effortless, the source of these tears should be acknowledged, he says: 'for the Lord has come uninvited, and is giving us the sponge of God-loving sorrow and the cool water of devout tears to wipe out the record of our sins'.[183]

Klimakos' emphasis on awareness of the day of judgment as an adjunct to penitent grief has already been demonstrated. This dark side is balanced by his knowledge of the God who works with human

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[180] *Step 7*, 28, 808B, Moore (1959) 117.
[181] *Step 7*, 17, 805A, Moore (1959) 115.
[182] 805D and 808A, Moore (1959) 116/7.
[183] *Step 7*, 25, 805D, Moore (1959) 117. This may be compared with Mark the Hermit, *On the Spiritual law*, no. 15, PG 65, 907, 'Do not grow conceited if you shed tears when you pray. For it is Christ who has touched your eyes and given you spiritual sight.'

efforts, to provide comfort and relief from the pain of sins. He describes this co-operation between God's grace and human endeavours as being akin to creation, in which 'there is that which moves by itself and that which is moved otherwise'.[184] When the 'otherwise', which is God, acts in humans, Klimakos says, the compunction produced is 'greater than that which comes as a result of our effort and meditation'.[185] Just as the life of penitence is not a purely individual existence, the monk being bound by prayer and love to fellow monks and the angels, so the true penitent is never without the mercy of God. The mourner is not living in isolation, nor solely in grief, but as a child of God. Klimakos invites 'those who have ears to hear' to receive the analogy he makes between the love of human parents and that of God.[186] We should not seek to understand how God's grace works; it is 'ineffable . . . unknowingly perceived and invisibly seen'.[187] The synergy of God and his creature in the practice of penitential grief is a significant feature of Klimakos's teachings.

The specific teachings of Klimakos about *penthos* have been explored in some depth, and it is now possible to evaluate his insights within the context of the early monastic milieu. Klimakos clearly belongs to the desert tradition. This is attested by such matters as the nature of his text, its concerns and audience, his drawing on the mine of previous patristic experience, the emphasis on the need to write only of what one has lived out, and the interpretation of 'tradition' as a corpus of wisdom passed from one spiritual athlete to another. The choice of *The Ladder* as a text to be read every Lent in each Orthodox monastery down to this century indicates his secure position within the eastern Christian Church. Belonging to this ecclesial community is demonstrated not primarily by innovation but through faithfulness to existing insights, combined with a humble, discerning cooperation with the Holy Spirit. The desert tradition as a fundamental spiritual building block of this Church presents not a homogenous blandness but a diversity within unity, in which common beliefs and experiences are lived out within their own context.

Klimakos expresses, with great authority and clarity, quintessential desert teachings in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*. His teachings on

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[184] *Step 7*, 25, 805D, Moore (1959) 116.
[185] *Step 7*, 25, 805D, Moore (1959) 117.
[186] *Step 7*, 59, 813C, Moore (1959) 122.
[187] *Step 7*, 55, 813B, Moore (1959) 121.

penthos offer a distinctive voice within that tradition. The ambiguity about the genre and structure of his text may be read as an important aspect of his teaching, namely that *penthos* has a universal application. Mourning for sin is understood as a continual process, not restricted to certain stages of the spiritual journey. Klimakos uses the image of the ceaseless motion of the sea, gradually wearing away the ancient density of rocks, to describe how compunction and tears work in the heart of the penitent. Mourning for sin, for Klimakos, mirrors an eternal pattern in nature. It is not only a continual ascetic labour, it is essential and possible, not something which is only available to the saints among us. Klimakos reminds his reader that:

> At the day of judgment the Lord will not blame us for not having done miracles or not having understood mysteries . . . or theology, but he *will* blame us for not having continued in tears and lamentation all the days of our life because of our sins.[188]

This sense of the continual need for repentance, combined with his emphasis on the need to remember death and the day of judgement, suggests a strongly eschatological view of *penthos*. The *kairos* and the taxonomy are God's. The individual's encounter with God confers a continual desire to restore human nature to its original closeness to God. Klimakos is explicit that fallen mourners who continue to grieve are more blessed than those who have not fallen, 'because as a result of their fall, they have risen by a sure resurrection'.[189] For Klimakos, the Christian reading of such a universal condition as *penthos* is that it constitutes a resurrection experience, in which all may partake. It is a resurrection which reiterates the Book of Revelation, the language of which he echoes in describing how the first man—and all his heirs—will again have no tears, just as before the fall.[190] This concept of resurrection goes some way to explaining the conjunction of grief and joy in *penthos*. It is in mourning for sin that fallen humanity can experience the confidence that Paschal joy will follow the grief of the Passion.

Another aspect of Klimakos' universality is his insistence on the integration of the whole person in mourning for sin. He stresses that the sense of grief for sins must be felt in the heart: it is not a purely

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[188] *Step 7*, 70, 816D, Moore (1959) 123.
[189] *Step 5*, 26, 776B, Moore (1959) 106.
[190] See *Step 7*, 45, 809C, Moore (1959) 119.

intellectual event and certainly not one that can be conjured up deliberately, though he asserts that tears are not irrational. The body, with all its wayward tendencies, is integrated into this process, being no more or less pure than the heart and its innermost intentions. This focus on the heart, and his compassion for the trials inflicted by bodies, is a substantial move away from Evagrian intellection. Whilst being the fruit of the rational mind, because they are human, penitent tears are the result of introspection, not speculation. They arise not from an intellectual theological discussion but from *metanoia*, the conscious movement towards God in love and awe, and the corresponding love of God for humanity. Klimakos's sense of the integration of the whole person does not constitute a lenient view of human proclivities and behaviour. Rather, it invokes as the judge of human activity God himself, rather than the perfected human person. In the relationship between spiritual father and child which is axiomatic in Klimakos's text, is seen the coinherence of love and fear in the human response to God. This subtle but basic combination of human responses to the Almighty is stressed by Klimakos as the desirable norm, a bittersweet experience like the holy Lent which precedes the paschal mystery.

Klimakos has provided a starting point for this study of *penthos* in that he exemplifies the desert tradition which underlies the specific, local expression of penitent grief. The particular 'desert' of Klimakos is in seventh century Sinai. Moving now to fourth century Syria, a particular rhetorical style and mode of expression is discovered, which, like the desert of which Klimakos is an exemplar, provides a distinctive mine of spiritual treasures.

SECTION III

‘SHE BATHED HIS FEET WITH HER TEARS:’ EPHREMIC INTERPRETATIONS OF LUKE 7.36–50

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EARLY SYRIAN PERSPECTIVE

The Early Syrian Church offers a distinctive perspective on the spiritual life which shapes its understanding of penitent grief. This will be explored through appraisal of texts on the Lucan pericope about the 'sinful woman', both those written by Ephrem, an archetypal representative of this ecclesial tradition, and others writing within his ambit. In order to engage with this material it is important first of all to look at some relevant characteristics of early Syrian asceticism.

As with the concept of 'desert' already explored, the generic term 'the Syrians' needs some explanation and justification, and placing within the context of its rival cultures. In terms of its distinctiveness and dominance, modern scholars point to Syriac Christianity as being a significant strand within the early Church until the fourth century, when it began to become secondary in importance to Greek Christianity. According to Barnard, this was due to the lack of 'first rate intellects' in the Syrian Church;[1] less judgmental evaluations of the period up to the fifth century consider the extent to which Syrian culture was isolated[2] or integrated[3] into a broader Church. This is a well-established debate, to which might be added the comment that parallelism is as likely to have taken place as direct influence, and that, in common with much of Early Christendom, a hybrid situation of diversity and syncretism existed in Syria at this time.

So what constitutes a Syrian outlook? Historians and commentators have argued that certain modes of expression and ascetic attitudes prevail among Syrian writers before the fifth century, but are quick to point out that the attempt to give an accurate definition of the term raises as many questions as it answers. It is a designation beset by misconceptions, as Sidney Griffith reminds his reader, stating the major problem associated with a study of Syrian monasticism as being

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[1] (1968) 174ff.
[2] Murray (1982) 6.
[3] Drivjers (1984) 1–3.

that 'the past has almost always been read through lenses supplied by such essentially Byzantine texts as Theodoret of Cyrrhus' *History of the Monks of Syria*, Palladius' *Historia Lausiaca*, and Sozomen's *Church History*'.[4] Whilst these important historical documents reveal a great deal about their author's understanding of Church history and contemporary attitudes to hagiography, they do not always accurately describe the theological concerns of the monastic writers themselves, being primarily retrospective eulogies written from and for a different culture.

A sound understanding of the particular insights into mourning for sin can only be achieved by scrutiny of specific, primary sources of Syrian asceticism, examples of which may be found in Beggiani.[5] These arise from a context which may be broadly described as 'Syrian', which cannot be defined purely by location, mother tongue or date, but a Biblically based methodology, in which symbolism and typology take precedence over analysis and rhetoric. This can be crudely distinguished from the Greek approach, described by McCarthy as having 'a more philosophical and analytical character', compared to Ephrem's 'primarily symbolic and synthetic' mode of operating.[6] The geographical perimeters of 'Syrian' may be defined as northern Mesopotamia and Adiabene,[7] including the chief cities of Edessa (the modern day city of Urfa), sometimes described as 'the cradle of Syrian monasticism',[8] Antioch, Damascus and Tyre.

The physical boundaries to Syria do not, however, adequately define its ecclesial or ascetic boundaries, which Beck determines as constituting 'the Church of the Syriac language'.[9] (This useful insight must, though, be read the context of his primary concern, which is the debate surrounding the growth of monasticism and the concept of a proto-monasticism.)[10] Beck suggests that the language belongs to an ecclesial tradition, again an important distinction, because the language used

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[4] In Wimbush/Valantasis (1995) 221. Griffith's chief concern here is to defend the authorship of certain texts attributed to Ephrem.

[5] The *Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality* (1991) provides succinct biographies and backgrounds to fourteen Syrian authors. Sebastian Brock's many articles and anthologies provide essential contextualisation and very readable English translations of many texts.

[6] Trans (1993) 15.

[7] Barnard (1978) 197.

[8] Barnard (1978) 197.

[9] Beck (1958) 276.

[10] Vööbus' seminal study (1958, 1960 and 1997) supplies much essential information on this matter.

by a writer is insufficient to identify an author as 'Syrian' in the understanding of the word employed here. In the third and fourth centuries, Syriac was 'the third international language of the Church', Meyendorff claims,[11] a statement which is important on two grounds, firstly because it suggests a universal significance which transcends geographical boundaries and also because it places a *terminus ad quem* on that significance. Translation of popular texts between Syriac and Greek took place from an early date, and as Drijvers comments, biliteracy was common among educated people of the time, and 'it may even be supposed that most texts were written down in two versions from the very outset'.[12] Brock also comments on the bilingual nature of literary culture in this context;[13] Murray, however, suggests that it is not known for certain whether Ephrem understood Greek.[14] Not all writers living in Syrian territory wrote primarily in Syriac, for example, the 'Antiochene' theologian Theodoret of Cyrrhus wrote in Greek. The impact of the language itself can only be appreciated by recognising the characteristically highly symbolic mode of expression of early Syrian writers. The polysemantic nature of Syriac word roots encourages layers of related meanings. For example, the verbal root *qwm* (from which *qyama* (covenant) derives), can also mean 'stand' and even 'standing up among the dead,' leading to the possible interpretation that to be part of such a covenant is to be included in the resurrection.[15] Another example is Sebastian Brock's comment about the verb *mad*, which means both 'to dive' for treasure, as in collecting pearls, and 'to baptise'.[16]

Syriac abounds with vibrant and concrete physical images, which symbolically describe profound mysteries in the language of everyday life, and writers who think or express themselves in Syriac use the concreteness of their language to disclose the complex mystery of penitent grief. Symbolism and typology become not only poetic devices of great beauty, but also, crucially, a means to teach theological truths, and this sophisticated and rich use of language can be seen

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[11] See his *Introduction* in trans McVey (1989) 1.
[12] (1984) 3. He also deals with this issue in (1981) 25.
[13] (1989(ii)) 139.
[14] (1982) 9.
[15] Griffith (1995) 230–1. He cites here some of the arguments for and against this extrapolation, and concludes that although 'resurrection' cannot necessarily be taken as a translation for *qyama*, the likelihood is that such a connection was intended.
[16] (1985) 90–1.

to great effect in the *Homilies* on Luke's story of the 'sinful woman', which is a favourite subject for Ephrem and his followers. Ephrem explores this pericope in various genres, and in each of the forms chosen, his writing is moulded by a sense that types and symbols are not just important literary devices, but indicative of the mystery of God's redeeming work. The word *raza* (symbol) appears prominently, and the significance of this is explained by Brock, who tells us that, for the Syriac Fathers '*raza*, "symbol", indicates the connection between two different modes of reality . . . a symbol actually participates in some sense with the spiritual reality it symbolizes'.[17] The symbol does not merely *represent* something other, in a metaphorical sense; rather at some level it *constitutes* it. For Ephrem, the hidden meaning of matter is revealed by the 'luminous eye of faith',[18] the process of concealed power known as *hayla kasya*,[19] which Brock describes in his discussion of *kasyutha* (hiddenness). The antithesis between visible and invisible dominates the exegesis of the encounter between Christ and the woman who, despite her apparent unworthiness, has the wisdom and grace to recognize his prophetic mastery.

The earthiness of its imagery and the manner in which material and spiritual coinhere within the language does not, however, imply that the Syrians were entirely at ease with the physical world and humanity's place within it. In the period under scrutiny, accusations of encratism were levied at certain ascetic practices, which entailed extreme brutality to the body and could easily be read as rejection of or hostility to the body, which can only be contextualised if placed in the context of Syrian anthropology. It is important to understand that what is distinctively Syrian in this early period is not a negative dualism, but an integrated approach to human anthropology and humanity's engagement with its Creator which is expressed through a whole mode of being. This marks it off from the alternative strands of the early church which Barnard describes as predominantly legal (Roman) and ontological (Greek). The Syrians, on the other hand, 'understood Christianity as a Way of Life—and largely an ascetic Way'.[20]

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[17] Trans (1990) 42ff. Other comments on the subject may be found in *The Harp of the Spirit* (1983) 12, 13, and see also Murray (1975–6) 3–9.

[18] *Hymn 3 on the Faith*, verse 5, quoted Brock (1985) 73. Brock also offers useful explanations of this term in the introduction in his translation of the *Hymns on Paradise*, (1990).

[19] Trans Brock (1990) 42ff.

[20] (1978) 197.

This 'ascetic Way' may be seen in the integrity of the Syrian penitential life, in which every physical action reflects the inner human being within the matrix of a conscious and deliberate engagement with God. Murray describes this covenantal concept as 'the core or heart of the early Syriac Church'.[21] Ascetic practices, such as fasting, sleep deprivation and physical tears to express penitent grief, empower the human body with an essential role in the work of salvation. The heavy demands of ascetic discipline are the spiritual currency in an economy of salvation which brings great rewards: the one who mourns on earth will receive joy in heaven. The submission of the body and its desires to the state of purity denoted by virginity enables the 'spiritual athlete' to put on the bridal gown of Christ; the covenant between God and mankind is one of mutual response and responsibility, and in this dynamic there is joy as well as mourning. A brief look at some of main terminology and concepts of Syriac asceticism shows the distinctiveness of the tradition.

Encratism and Anthropology

Several key words recur in Syrian ascetic texts, which need to be explained in order to highlight their assumptions about the nature of the human person. They relate predominantly to the issues of physical relationships, specifically virginity and celibacy, known in Syriac as *Btul(t)a*. The term *qaddisha* denotes a married person who has renounced sexual relations. All three conditions were highly venerated, both as expressions of ascetic endeavour, and because such continence alone enables one to become the bride of Christ[22] (images of the bride and the bridal chamber abound in Syriac literature.) [23] Virginity is prized as symbolising purity not just of sexual continence, but primarily of heart and intention; it is an outer manifestation of an inner state, the hiddenness having particular significance. The emphasis on asexual behaviour is perhaps disproportionately striking to a modern reader: the emphasis here is on the integrity and focus of the human person, as much as their abstinence.

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[21] (1982) 8.

[22] Vööbus (1958) 70ff.

[23] Drijvers (1984) 10, cf. (1982) 171. He also notes that in Manichaean texts, this imagery is used to denote the Church (1982) 168.

Another polyvalent term much used is *Ihidaya*, meaning both single-minded and solitary. Abouzayd's study provides a detailed analysis of the concept,[24] Beck gives some useful background to the term (and *qyama, btule* and *qaddise*)[25] and Vööbus devotes a chapter to the issue,[26] Griffith notes that is equivalent to the Greek μονᾰ́χος.[27] The *Liber Graduum*, (believed by Hausherr to date some time between the death of Ephrem in 373,[28] and the diffusion of the Peshitta),[29] discloses the peculiarly Syrian style of asceticism as being less a prioritising of physical anachoresis, and more a focus on the internalisation of spiritual warfare, regardless of the choice of home and life style.[30] The *ihidaya* might even live in or near villages, in contradistinction to the Egyptian hermits' choice of the wilderness, because purity of heart and chastity of thoughts were more essential to the Syrian spiritual pilgrim than external manifestations of the inner condition. This interpretation of 'inner singleness' is exemplified in the *Liber Graduum, Discourse XVIII*, in which the outward expression of penitence—tears of grief for sin—is the catalyst for its internalisation. This discourse is entitled 'On the Tears of Prayer' and could stand as a synopsis of early Syrian attitudes to mourning for sin. It focuses such grief on purity of heart, a condition that unites body and soul in orientation towards a God of mercy and righteous wrath. The penitent's awe and love of God causes tears, of longing to be restored to his Father's favour, and of joy at God's welcome to His prodigal child. The tears show visibly the hidden grief of the heart, the process of *hayla kasya* already mentioned. The *Liber Graduum* uses Biblical constructs and Scriptural citation as its mode of discourse. It epitomises the contemporary understanding of the role of the body in the salvation of the whole person, an anthropology that expresses the covenantal relationship between humanity and its creator. This familiar Semitic construct is sometimes expressed by the phrase *Bnay/bnat*

[24] (1993).
[25] (1958) 276–8.
[26] (1958) 106ff.
[27] (1995) 234–5.
[28] (1935) 495–502. Although the *Liber Graduum* postdates Ephrem, it is referred to here as a striking example of the prevailing Syrian mode of asceticism and style of discourse.
[29] The Peshitta became the generally recognised Biblical text for the Syrian Church from about the beginning of the fifth century.
[30] Baker (1979) 402–3.

qyama (sons/and daughters of the covenant), a definition supported by both Murray[31] and Griffith.[32]

Clearly, in a study of mourning and grief for sin, the most significant ascetic term is *Abila*, which corresponds most closely to the sense of the Greek *penthos*. Griffith translates this as 'the one who mourns', and notes that the word is especially associated with Ephrem.[33] This term denotes the strongly ascetical impetus of the Syrian Churches, for whom the ideal life, indeed for some the only one that will enable union with God,[34] is solitary, celibate, and focused on the correct relationship with God. Deprivation of this intimacy with the Maker and Judge of all causes grief, as attested by Section Two of *Discourse XVIII* of the *Liber Graduum*, which describes the tears that arise from separation and reunification with a loved one. (Klimakos uses a very similar image, describing the joyful reunion of a child and parent after a period of absence).[35] Mourning is therefore the natural mode of expression of the monk, so much so that 'mourner' was one early synonym for monk.[36] Symeon the Stylite was known as 'the chief of Mourners', according to his biographer in the Syriac *Vita*.[37] It is among Syrian writers that we most strongly find the very identity of the monk defined by his mourning: Dadisho Katraya's *Treatise on Solitude and Prayer*[38] cites the first occupation of a solitary as being weeping over past and current sins. Perpetual weeping is achieved by dwelling on 'every word or Psalm in which there is mention of sorrow or penitence'.[39] Ephrem's use of the term 'mourner' constitutes, according to Griffith, 'one of the technical expressions . . . used to describe a person who in another milieu might be called an anchorite',[40] and Vööbus[41] likewise notes that the term *abila* became used predominantly to describe the hermit rather than lay people, suggesting that whilst the

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[31] (1982) 5–8.
[32] (1995) 229–234.
[33] Griffith (1995) 234–5.
[34] Trans Brock (1990) 29ff.
[35] *Step 7*, 59, 813C, Moore (1959) 122.
[36] Hausherr refers specifically to Syrian monasticism in his claim that: 'The doctrine of *penthos* was so deeply engrained in the Syriac-speaking Christians that the very word of the second beatitude (πένθοῦντες = abile) became the word for monks.' (1982) 15.
[37] Quoted by Abouzayd (1993) 239.
[38] Trans Mingana (1934).
[39] Mingana (1934) 10, a and b, 86, and 54b, 141.
[40] (1995) 234.
[41] (1960) 283, cf. Abouzayd (1993) 241.

laity can, and should, strive for perfection, the highest spiritual development is achieved only by those who renounce life in the world.

Some individual expressions of this grief constituted extreme examples of ascetic endeavour. Isaac mentions holy fathers who 'bound their tongue by means of a stone or tied themselves with a cord';[42] Theodoret mentions hermits who weighted their bodies with iron fetters like prisoners.[43] Such practices led to the accusation of encratism.[44] This needs to be held in tension with a fundamentally holistic anthropology. The Semitic understanding of sin is not a juridical one, in which an act must be atoned for in a legalistic sense. Rather, it is that the human condition constitutes a pattern of 'falling short' and being healed through penitence. Human penitence is thus closely related to an understanding of what was at the centre of the human being; was it the νους, as in the earlier Greek tradition, or the heart, as generally found in Biblical anthropology? There are not, at this period, water-tight divisions between the two, and Brock outlines the appropriate understanding of the term 'heart' in this context as being 'the centre of our whole being, and the seat, not only of the emotions (as it still remains for us in popular usage), but also of the intellect, of thought and the will'.[45] It is when the focus of one's being is moved to the head, Brock explains that 'we get the dichotomy of the heart versus the head, feeling versus reason', which is the breeding ground of dualism, and promotes an artificial distinction between head and heart which did not exist in context of the world-view which is the subject of this study. The heart-centered concept, which Brock identifies as Hebraic, is not restricted to the Syrians but may be found throughout the ancient Mediterranean Christian world, which in turn demonstrates its heritage of Judaism. For example, Barnard corroborates Vööbus's strongly held conviction that the early Syrian church owed its extreme asceticism to 'Palestinian sectarianism'[46] and Baker notes the Syrians' enthusiasm for St. Paul and their understanding of 'the anti-pharisaic principle of the Gospels'.[47]

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[42] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 311.

[43] HR, XXI, 8, trans Jackson (1995) 136, as cited by Abouzayd (1993) 242–3.

[44] For a detailed discussion of the precise meaning of this term, by which we designate severe ascetical practices, see Chapter Three of S. Burns, *Charisma and Spirituality in the Early Church: A study of Messalianism and Pseudo-Macarius*, PhD thesis, Leeds 1999.

[45] (1982) 132.

[46] (1968) 175, and cf. his very similar article (1978) 205–6.

[47] (1979) 405.

A heart-focused understanding of anthropology permits the integration of the body as an essential aspect of humanity, and this is precisely what happens in the exegesis of the 'sinful woman' and her encounter with Jesus at the house of Simon the Pharisee. The body is not merely a vehicle of the soul; because it is an integral part of the human person, it reflects the saving power of the Incarnation, in which a fully divine, fully human Christ took on human flesh in order to redeem it. Mourning for sins was not simply an exercise in penitence for sins committed by self and others: it was a participation in the sufferings of Christ who became incarnate for the sake of sinful humanity. The monastic emphasis on the need to mortify the body was 'not a struggle with the body *per se* but rather with the sin that dwelt within it',[48] a battle not with σωμα but with σαρξ, to use Paul's distinction. Similarly, victory over the demands of the flesh was prized because of the purity of heart revealed by such abstention, hence the concept of virginity constituting not genital control, but a permanent state of mind, described by Abouzayd as 'a concept of consummate purity in God'.[49] Monastic encratism thus reflects not a dualistic distaste for the body, but an awareness of the need to refurbish its original purity, in order for it to be a bride of Christ.

Ephrem is firmly rooted in what could be called a Syrian method of thinking and working, and his followers continue the trend. Using various genres, they focus on how hiddenness becomes manifest—as in the Incarnation of Christ—and how the inner and outer aspects of humanity can be united and restored through grief for sin. They articulate a penitential theology which suggests the redemptive nature of weeping. The characteristically Biblical modes of typology, symbolism and antithesis are applied to specific women whose stories appear in the New Testament. They seek healing for the inner and outer selves, healing both from physical infirmity and spiritual disease. In the case of the 'sinful woman' of Luke's story, Ephrem sees one who, through grief for sin, externalises a profound inner knowledge, and in so doing provides a uniquely female exegesis of the mystery of the Incarnation of Christ and his power to save, enacted through the physicality of human bodies.

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[48] Abouzayd (1993) 236. He quotes Ephrem's *On Solitaries* to corroborate his findings.

[49] (1993) 67ff.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONTEXT OF SYRIAN COMMENTARIES ON THE 'SINFUL WOMAN'

Luke's account in 7.37–50 of the Sinful Woman who bathes the feet of Jesus with her penitent tears is the inspiration for a number of theological commentaries in Syriac, several of them clearly based on the *Homily on the Sinful Woman*, which has been attributed to Ephrem.[1] Given the uncertainties surrounding the authorship of this text, it is perhaps best to view this corpus of Homilies on the 'sinful woman' as representative of what might be called an 'Ephremic' strand within the wider Syrian tradition, rather than specifically deriving from Ephrem himself. In additional to the dubiously attributed homily, a substantial portion of the more definitively authentic *Homily on our Lord* also treats of the subject.[2] Brock has edited two dialogue poems on the subject (one of which is medieval), which seem to draw on Ephrem's homily,[3] and Graffin has translated three anonymous homilies.[4] Another homily by Jacob of Serugh has recently been translated,[5] and Sauget[6] provides a translation of another homily 'attributed to Bishop John', which may refer to Chrysostom, whose homily on the subject in Sa'idic is also extant.[7] This Coptic text shares with the two dialogue poems, and the putatively Ephremic homily, an extended dialogue between the woman and Satan and the seller of perfumes, a significant addition to the Biblical source. Sauget's introduction to his edition refers to the plethora of Byzantine homilies based on this

[1] Trans Johnston (1995). As well as the *Homily on the Sinful Woman*, listed as number 3 in this translation, number 1 *On our Lord* devotes a substantial section to the same story. The authorship of the *Homily on the Sinful Woman* has not been established, and the inclusion of it with other more authoritatively attributed texts in this very early and unreliable edition may be misleading.

[2] Trans Johnston (1995).

[3] Beck, Sermones II. no. 4, trans Brock (1988).

[4] References are to the edition of 1962. The third text to which Graffin refers in this text was published in PO 41 (1982–4) 451–527.

[5] Trans Johnson (2002).

[6] (1975–6)

[7] Ed Al-Masih (1958–60).

text; Brock[8] notes that this story is one motif that found its way from Syriac literature into Greek texts, and Carpenter notes in her edition of the *Kontakia* of Romanos that this was 'a peculiarly oriental motif".[9] (*Ode 10* by Romanos is on the Sinful Woman).

Why was this story such a popular choice in the late antique Syrian world? Its popularity may be accounted for partially by the prevailing anthropology and penitential ethos already described: here is a sinner transformed by and through her tears of grief, which not only restore her to God but do so in full integrity as a person with a body, and an attractive one at that, not the ravaged and neglected body of the hermit. For the modern reader a particular appeal of these texts may be that the Syrian tradition of typology and symbolism provides, in the person of the penitent woman, a model for the whole of sinful humanity who is perhaps uniquely a female mouthpiece of incarnational theology. This, together with the recurring and thoroughly Biblical concept of Mary as second Eve, is a powerful antidote to the dominant misogyny and patriarchal emphasis of much of the early Christian period. In Ephrem's case, it may be that his focus on female characters reflects his sympathy for, and understanding of, the local and specific audience for which he was writing, and it is worth remembering that it is unlikely that he was a monk, and therefore he had not elected to separate himself from that half of the human population represented by Eve. Indeed, as a deacon, he would have worked with a normal cross-section of the population. A few more details about his life will put this into context.

The beginning of this chapter voiced a caveat about relying on Byzantine sources for information about the Syrian Fathers: nowhere is this more necessary than in the life of Ephrem, where a deceptively full *Vita* is proposed but not corroborated by internal evidence from his own writings. Jerome's *Book of Illustrious Men*, written only two decades after Ephrem's death affirms his enduring importance to the Syrian Church.[10] Both Palladius in the early fifth century,[11] and shortly afterwards Sozomen[12] give glowing accounts of his literary

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[8] (1989(i)) 144.
[9] Trans (1970) 99.
[10] PG 23, (1883), chapter cxv, cols 745C–748A, trans Richardson (1995) 382.
[11] *Lausiac History* 40.
[12] *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.16, trans Hartrauft (1995) 295–297.

merits; Theodoret[13] and Gennadius[14] give brief mention of Ephrem. Outtier accepts to a great extent the authenticity of these Byzantine accounts;[15] a more critical appraisal of their findings and other bibliographic suppositions may be found in Brock's comprehensive introduction to the *Hymns on Paradise*.[16] Ephrem's dates may be taken as c. 307 to 373, and it is generally accepted that he was born into a Christian family, ordained as a deacon, and worked as a catechetical teacher, predominantly with women. The evidence for this comes from a verse panegyric by Jacob of Serugh, cited by Brock,[17] which describes Ephrem as 'a second Moses for women folk,' in other words, he saw his leadership of his flock as encompassing their spiritual needs, which he met by composing hymns specifically for them. This panegyric notes that these women are enabled to do this through the work of the second Eve, who has purged them of the first Eve, an analogy much used by Ephrem himself. Marian typology features strongly throughout Ephrem's works.[18] Brock notes Ephrem's affection for and interest in women, from which he extrapolates that it was unlikely that he was a monastic (who would avoid even the sight of women as abhorent).[19] Ephrem died not long after having assisted victims of famine. The three sieges of Nisibis feature significantly in his works, and his hymns also comment on relationships with significant bishops of the day.

Ephrem's handling of this exciting material is, from a literary point of view, compelling. The appeal of his poetry has been recognized only relatively recently, according to Brock,[20] who has played a large part in the renaissance of interest in his theological use of symbolism and paradox within wellcrafted verse. It is as a 'theologian-poet'[21] that

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[13] *Ecclesiastical History*, 4.26, trans Jackson (1995) 129.

[14] *Supplement to Jerome's Book of Illustrious Men*, chapter LXVII, trans Richardson (1995) 396.

[15] (1973).

[16] Trans (1990).

[17] Trans Brock (1990) 22–4.

[18] McVey's introduction gives several examples, especially on 32–4.

[19] Brock explains that the issue of whether or not Ephrem was a monk must be seen in the light of the presence at the time of 'proto-monasticism' trans (1990) 25–33. In this, he corroborates the findings of Beck (1958), especially 298, who concludes that a confusion of monasticism with 'the asceticism of the young church' had taken place.

[20] Brock (1975–6) 21–23 cites the disparaging comments of Burkitt and Segal, and attributes the opinions to the fact that they looked in vain for certain biographical and historical references in Ephrem's works.

[21] Murray (1975) 220–3.

he should be read. His use of complex literary and linguistic devices, such as antithesis, paradox, and puns, not only produce extraordinarily beautiful literature, but also illuminate his theology. In particular, his exploration of the dynamic between what is hidden and what is revealed discloses a fundamentally incarnational basis to his thought. Modern scholars of the language and thought of Ephrem have much to say about his use of typology and reworking of Syrian poetic forms:[22] this study focuses more specifically on the theological significance of his writings. The Lucan story of the 'sinful woman' appears in all three of the verse forms chosen by Ephrem: *memre* (verse homilies), *madrashe* (stanza form hymns), and *soghyatha* (dialogue poems),[23] which Halleux believes show 'the ephremic theology'[24] better than his biblical commentaries.

A Typology of Womanhood

In the chosen homilies, conflations of several New Testament women engender a typology of womanhood, which articulates a distinctive theological voice. The women characters involved may be found in Matthew 26.6–13, Mark 14.3–9, Luke 7.36–50 and John 12.1–11, of which the Matthean and Marcan versions involve an anonymous woman anointing Jesus' head with precious ointment in Bethany; the Johannine version names her as Mary and mentions the use of her hair to wipe his feet. Only the Lucan story specifically mentions a 'sinful woman' who weeps over Jesus' feet, and wipes them with her hair. Luke extends this account into an extended parable about forgiveness and righteousness, addressed to Simon the Pharisee. Fitzmeyer discusses these biblical conflations,[25] and Ward cites evidence of medieval conflations of these characters.[26] In Ephrem, the dominant

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[22] Full bibliographical details of the substantial number of studies of typology in Ephrem may be found in Murray's scholarly monograph and full-length study (1975 and 1975–6), and in Brock (1983) especially 37, where he notes that in Ephrem's hands, typology becomes 'something of an art form.' McVey likewise lists numerous modern studies on Ephrem's use of symbols, (1989) 41.

[23] Detailed definitions of these forms may be found in Brock (1983) 35–45, trans (1990) 336–39, and trans (1992) 34.

[24] (1973) 36. Halleux's understanding of Ephrem's theology is that he avoids so-called Greek dualism whilst already being part of 'a profound intellectual osmosis' of both Hellenic and Semitic mindsets.

[25] (1979) 684ff.

[26] (1987) 10–25.

conflation is that of Luke's sinful woman, (who appears not only in the two verse homilies but a number of hymns),[27] with the anonymous woman at Bethany.[28] This conflated figure stands apart from the Johannine Mary of Bethany. Harvey notes that this emphasis in the homiletic material of the time 'shifts from a focus on the figure of Christ or Christ's interaction with Simon the Pharisee, to a focus on the Sinful Woman as a narrative character, and through her perfumed ointment, an approach to Christ.'[29] What this effects is a move from male commentary to female insight, a significant emphasis in the late antique period. This is further borne out by Ephrem's insistence that the woman acts without the mediating power of priests,[30] and Jacob of Serugh's homily also notes the autonomy with which the woman acts: 'She was a priest for herself who would advocate forgiveness.'[31] Her ability to recognize Christ for what he is supercedes the doubts the righteous Pharisee has about Jesus' prophetic power. Jacob's *memra* alone of the texts under discussion here works with a synthesis of the four different gospel versions of women who anointed or wept over Jesus, a perspective Scott Johnson argues gives it a unique position.[32]

The conflated figure appears in the hymns and homilies,[33] and also in his *Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron*.[34] In addition, the 'sinful woman' is mentioned in juxtaposition to the woman with the haemorrhage[35] and in connection with the Samaritan woman at the well[36]

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[27] *Hymn 26 on Virginity*, v. 4, *Hymn 35 on Virginity*, v. 5, *Hymn 14 on the Fast*, trans Rouwhorst (1989) vol. 2, and in the *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, 8 and 10, and *Hymn 9 on the Church*, v. 19, trans Murray (1980) 38.

[28] Mt 26.6–13 and Mk 14.3–10. This conflation in Ephrem may be seen in *Hymn 4 on Virginity*, v. 11, and the *Hymn 9 on the Church*, 10, trans Murray (1980). Robinson (1997) offers further arguments concerning the shared identity of Mary of Bethany (who he sees as the 'Sinner Woman'), and Mary of Magdala.

[29] Ashbrook Harvey, in ed Blowers (2002) 69.

[30] *Homily on our Lord, 44*, trans Johnston (1995) 325.

[31] Johnson (2002) 66.

[32] Johnson (2002) 56.

[33] For example, *Hymn 10 on the Faith*, stanza 5, trans Murray (1970) 142.

[34] Trans McCarthy (1993) Book 7, 18, 137. The antithesis between what is hidden and what is revealed is a significant motif in the story of the woman with the haemorrhage and the sinful woman, in this text; note especially Section 7, 1, 2 and 6, 129–31. As well as conflations, the different characters are frequently found in juxtaposition to each other, suggesting that the stories illuminate each other.

[35] Mt 9.20–22, Mk 5.25–34 and Lk 8.40–48. This character appears in the following texts: *Hymn 4 on Virginity*, v. 7, *Hymn 26 on Virginity*, v. 6, *Hymn 34 on Virginity*, 411, *Hymn 10 on the faith*, v. 5, trans Murray (1970) 143, *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 7, nos. 1, 2, 6, 9, 18, trans McCarthy (1993), *On our Lord*, no. 13, trans Johnston (1995).

[36] *Hymn 22 on Virginity*, verses 5 and 7, trans McVey (1989) 365–6. This juxtaposition is repeated in trans Brook (1988) 1, 5, 43.

whom Ephrem cites as a model of one healed of impurity by her penitence and faith, being 'a type of our humanity/that He leads step by step'.[37]

McVey, whose recent translations of a selection of the *Hymns* is most valuable, places Ephrem's focus on these women in the context of spiritual brides. She claims that: 'The anointing of Jesus by the sinful woman, perhaps to be identified here with Mary, sister of Martha, is placed in a line with priestly and royal messiahship, as well as being a model of forgiveness'.[38] Certainly, there are many references in the Hymns to the virtues of physical and spiritual virginity: more than fifty of the *Hymns* are grouped together under the title of *Hymns on Virginity*. The popularity of the image of the spiritual bridegroom was cited earlier as a significant feature of Syrian asceticism. A number of the hymns focus on the merits of oil, as used in anointing,[39] which also gives weight to McVey's comment, and Harvey's recent study explores in great detail the significance of the perfumed ointment.[40] Of equal importance is McVey's comment on the question of messiahship. The context of the Lucan text suggests the woman's response to Jesus and her confidence in approaching him for forgiveness constitutes a recognition of his messiahship and prophetic importance which Simon misunderstands (Luke 7.39), and this aspect of the story is brought out by the Syrian commentators, especially Jacob of Serugh. Although ostensibly a parable about sin and forgiveness, the Lucan pericope comments on Jesus' identity and the ability of a 'sinful woman' to see through the 'hiddenness' to the inner power of the Son of God in a way which the upright, male Pharisee is unable to do. This theme is ideally suited to the Syrian concept of the luminous eye of faith which is present in the woman, despite her sinfulness, and absent in her righteous male host.

This brings us to the fundamental reason for the choice of this character as an exegete of Jesus' humanity and divinity: her gender prompts an extended typology of Mary as second Eve. Murray notes that Ephrem adds to an established convention the analogy of the Holy Mother of God being like the Church. The name 'Mary' becomes,

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[37] Trans McVey (1989) 21, 360.
[38] Trans McVey (1989) 376.
[39] E.g. *Hymn 7 on Virginity*, trans McVey (1989) and see her comments on pp. 275–280, 287–91, 292–6.
[40] See ed Blowers (2002).

like Kepha, 'almost a functional title', he argues.[41] A Mary was the first person to see the incarnate Christ and the first to seek him in the empty tomb at the end of his incarnate life. McVey, in her introduction,[42] sees Ephrem's focus on Marian typology as fundamental to his incarnational theology. Mary typology provides Ephrem and his school with a model for a something broader, because running parallel to this convention (which is an obvious echo of the Pauline first and second Adam motif) is a generic typology of womanhood as the heirs of Eve. The woman who features in these homilies and commentaries thus becomes a model of sinning penitents. This is stated explicitly in the first of the anonymous homilies edited and translated by Graffin: 'Blessed are the sinners . . . the guilty ones . . . the image of Adam'[43] the author writes, 'for in calling this one, it is our entire race that he invites to love, and in her person, it is all sinners whom he invites to pardon'.[44] Compare this to *Hymn 4 on the nativity*, 40: 'the sinner who had been a snare for men—He made her an example for penitents',[45] and the first of the *Sogyatha* edited by Brock: 'O Son of God, who opened His mouth and forgave the sinner her sins, forgive us our sins too, just as you did her, for we have sinned just as did she'.[46] She represents human sinfulness, and her 'eye of faith', which draws Christ's pardon, is equally a model offered to all of humanity.

The sacramental significance of this typology is twofold: Brock mentions the explicitly eucharistic overtones to the first soghitha of his edition.[47] This is developed by references to the banquet in which Jesus is sharing when the woman approaches him. Jacog of Surugh's

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[41] Murray (1975) 147. He also notes the deliberate 'fusion' of Mary Magdalen and Mary the Mother of God, 146 and 330ff. See also his article on the subject (1971). For an example of this in Ephrem, see *Hymn 24 on Virginity*.

[42] Trans (1989) 32–4 and 44–46 especially. Specifically with reference to the sinful woman's anointing, *Hymn 4 on Virginity* notes that the oil used 'became the bridge to the remembrance of Mary to pass on her glory from generation to generation.' Line 11, 277.

[43] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 1–2, 179.

[44] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 4, 181. Cf. the comment in the homily edited by Sauget (1975–6) 'This name of sinner is effectually a name for of all dirtiness, an image full of impurities', 14, 166.

[45] Trans McVey (1989) 92.

[46] Trans (1992) 59, 52.

[47] The first soghitha in Brock's edition notes this explicitly, v. 60 trans (1992) 62:

And as the sinful woman was forgiven
because she kissed Your feet in Simon's house,
do You forgive Your church
which consumes Your Body and Blood at the altar.

homily, however, focuses rather on the baptismal elements of this anointing, again in typological terms: 'She prefigured the baptism of the world for the world symbolically', he writes.[48] In other words, the woman who ministers to the humanity of Jesus demonstrates, through the faith of her actions, his divine power.

The gender of the chosen protagonist is in itself used to a theological end by Ephrem, who talks of peculiarly female healings. For example, in Section 15 of part 7 of the *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, Ephrem reflects that faith in the incarnation is inspired by the healing of an unclean womb effected by the one born of a pure womb.[49] Both the woman with the haemorrhage and the 'sinful woman' consciously seek out Jesus, one covertly, the other openly, with a physical manifestation of an inner need for healing. They demonstrate that they have the 'eye of faith' required in order to be open to God. Female sexuality, represented by the hidden gynaecological ailments and by the overt sexuality of the supposed prostitute, thus become symbolic of the whole of humanity's need for cleansing and healing by the second Adam. The healing of mind and body are interdependent because of their indivisibility.[50] The Syrian tradition elaborates on the gynaecological metaphor by describing sin as sterility, which penitence restores to fecundity,[51] in the context of becoming a pure bride of Christ. Before commenting further on the general issue of how the female exegetes this story, it is worth looking in more detail at specific aspects of the actual homilies in which this model of penitence and faith appears.

Syrian Commentaries on the 'Sinful Woman:' Inner Dialogue, Transformation and the Eye of Faith

In several of the homilies under scrutiny, the author introduces characters and narrative components which do not occur in the Lucan

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[48] Trans Johnson (2002) 81.

[49] Trans McCarthy (1993) 136.

[50] Ephrem expresses this sense of the integrity of the human person in the *Nisibene Hymn* no. 69, v. 3, quoted trans Brock (1983) 77: 'You looked upon the body, as it mourned, and on the soul in its grief, for you had joined them together in love, but they had parted and separated in pain.'

[51] Sauget (1975–6), 3, 164, and 31, 168/9 compares the penitent sinful woman to Anna, the mother of Samuel. Exactly the same metaphor is used by Romanos in *Ode 10*, 8, trans Carpenter (1970) 104.

original. One such character is the seller of unguents, whose presence allows the possibility for symbolic discourse about anointing and perfume. This character is introduced as a tempter to the woman, urging her to keep her sinful way of life. This serves two purposes, firstly to emphasise the inner struggle of the woman's conscience against various worldly concerns, as well as with her sense of unworthiness. More significantly, the innovation of the seller of the perfume allows substantial elaboration on the anointing theme, which, through the conflation with the anointing at Bethany story, constantly reminds the reader that Christ died for sin, and the woman's anointing of him prefigured that death. This is another example of her prophetic insight, which is distinguished from the spiritual blindness of the righteous Pharisee, who questions the prophetic powers of Jesus (Luke 7.39). *Hymn 3 on the Epiphany* is explicit about this.[52] The anointing theme is also used to stress the majesty of Christ, that he is Son of God, a major theme in the *Hymns on Virginity*, for example, *Hymn 4 on Virginity*, 7 and 11:

> An abundance is oil with which sinners do business: the forgiveness of sins.
> By oil the Anointed forgave the sins of the sinner who anointed [his] feet.
> With [oil] Mary poured out her sin upon the head of the Lord of her sins . . .
> It became the bridge to the remembrance of Mary to pass on her glory from generation to generation.[53]

In Ephrem's hands, anointing acquires a conscious typology of its own: 'The oil jar she poured on Him emptied out a treasury of types on Him. In that moment the symbols of oil took shelter in the Anointed, and the treasurer of the symbols of oil completed the symbols for the Lord of symbols'.[54]

The sinful woman, in anointing Jesus, represents the one who recognizes Jesus' divinity, his power to save, and his ability to restore the lost image of God to soiled humanity.[55] This again makes her a type for all penitents. Her experience of penitence leads directly to

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[52] Trans Johnston (1995) 1–3, 269. This part of the hymn also uses the visible/invisible polarity which is a recuring motif in Ephrem.

[53] Trans McVey (1989) 278–9.

[54] *Hymn 6 on virginity*, 7, trans McVey (1989) 289–90.

[55] 'Mary by the oil showed forth the mystery of His mortality, Who by His teaching mortified the concupiscence of her flesh.' *Homily on our Lord* 47, trans Johnston (1995) 326.

the grief expressed in her tears. For Ephrem, oil is the chrism of the Son of God, the memorial of his saving death, the image of healing and purification. His emphasis on the anointing aspect of the story of the 'sinful woman' points out the depth of the healing which is granted to the truly penitent. This healing is of both body and mind: it is the transformation of both sin and disease into wholeness and purity, and as we shall see shortly, transformation plays a key part in this story.

Perhaps more significant psychologically than the perfume seller is the innovative appearance of Satan as a character in this drama. The *madrashe* attributed to Ephrem introduces the person of Satan as a personification of her previous life, and this allows for extended inner dialogue between her doubts and faith, her sin and hope for healing. The two *sogyatha* translated by Brock, which he believes to be clearly based on the Ephremic *memra*, both constitute a meditation purely on this point of conversion. The woman's conscience engages in dialogue with her old self, personified by Satan. Apart from the opening and closing stanzas, the whole of each text explores the rhetorical dialogue between the woman and her conscience, personified as Satan. In both texts, imagery of Christ the bridegroom points out the paradox of the purity of the prostitute. It is the awakening of her conscience which catalyses the movement of *metanoia* and leads her to weep at the feet of Jesus.[56] In each case the woman has the last word, confident that she has made the right decision in rejecting the evil disposition within her. Through the dialogue between the woman and her personified alter ego, she moves from an inner conviction to action. The *Homily on the Sinful Woman* attributed to Ephrem opens with the woman's weeping for her sins and her determination to change, and notes that having said these things inwardly, 'then she began to do outwardly'.[57]

The homily translated by Sauget makes specific reference to this pricking of conscience which is accompanied by an 'interior' repentance.[58] This text focuses on her inner thoughts, which are expressed

[56] Trans Brock (1992). On page 22 he describes these as 'an externalized account, in dramatized form, of the inner pyschological conflict through which the woman might be thought to have gone, with all the arguments for hesitating from her proposed action forcefully posed through the mouth of Satan.'

[57] Trans Johnston (1995) 2, 3, 326–7.

[58] Trans Sauget (1975–6) 22–5, 166–7.

not through audible words, but her eloquent eyes and tears,[59] which speak to Jesus of her grief for her sins. Here, in this moment of spiritual awakening, is found the Syrian equivalent of the Greek κατάνυξις, expressed not in a single word, but in a whole mass of typology and symbolism.

In the Ephremic *memra*, Satan appears in several guises. First he appears as one of her former customers, later, realising that he will not be able to dupe Jesus, he appears to Simon, knowing that 'secret things are not manifest to him'.[60] Satan's role is similar in the *Nisibene hymn no. 60*,[61] in which he berates the woman for abandoning him. Both in this hymn, and in the 'Ephrem' *soghitha*, Satan acknowledges the superior power of Jesus in the battle for the woman's conscience and spirit.[62] The voiced dialogue between the woman and her conscience is paralleled by her speechless discourse of the heart with Christ, in which the tension between inner and outer is expressed in the theological term 'the eye of faith'.

In the *Homily On the Sinful Woman*, the author repeatedly refers to Jesus as: 'He Who knows what is secret'.[63] The 'interior eye of his divinity'[64] enables him to see that the woman's soul is predisposed towards penitence, and a parallel interior vision on the part of the woman enables her to recognize Christ as the Lord, and to plead for spiritual healing. Through her act of physically anointing Jesus' feet she knows he is truly man.[65] The prayer that she offers makes it explicit that it is through the manifestation of his humanity that she dares to approach God.[66] This exchange of unspoken recognition between Jesus and the Sinful Woman becomes externalized in order to provide evidence of Jesus' humanity and divinity. This is elaborated on in the *Homily on Our Lord*:[67] it is when infirmities are brought into

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[59] Trans Sauget (1975–6) 30, 168.

[60] Trans Johnston (1995) 10–12, 338–9. Here, the antithethis between hiddenness and openness is used to indicate the blindness of Simon the Pharisee to the true nature of the woman's repentance, and his questioning the prophetic wisdom of Jesus (Luke 7.39). It is also commented on in the *Homily on our Lord*, trans Johnston (1995), especially 16, 311.

[61] Trans Johnston (1995) 212–3.

[62] In the latter, Jesus is referred to throughout as 'Mary's son'.

[63] Trans Johnston (1995) 14, 15, 340, cf. 10, 338–9. Sections 3 and 4 use the antithesis of the woman's secret and open actions.

[64] Trans Sauget (1975–6) 4, 164.

[65] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 19, 189.

[66] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 20 189–91.

[67] Trans Johnston (1995) 18–21, 312–4.

the open that they can be healed; the visible healing symbolizes the invisible healing of forgiveness. The *Commentary on the Diatessaron* notes with regard to the woman with the haemorrhage, (whose story is juxtaposed to that of the Sinful Woman) that 'By means of a woman whom they could see, they were enabled to see the divinity which cannot be seen. Through the Son's own healing his divinity became known, and through the healing of the afflicted woman, her faith was made manifest'.[68] These disclosures of Christ's divinity by unclean women can thus be implicitly compared with the revelation effected by the pure Mary, who 'enabled' his divinity to be seen and understood by housing and nourishing his physical body. Women therefore play an essential role in the articulation of Jesus' divinity, as corroborated by the fact that it was Mary Magdelene who sought and found Jesus at dawn on Easter Day.[69]

The soteriological relationship between the visible and invisible is a continual theme in these texts, as we can see in *Hymn 46 on Virginity*:

> Insofar as tears are found in our eyes,
> we will blot out with our tears the letter of bondage of our sins. . . .
> Who will give us [the possibility] that visible tears
> will blot out concealed sins?
> Who gives us [the possibility] that by visible things
> an invisible wound may be healed?[70]

For Ephrem and his school, the prototype of invisible made visible is the Incarnation. The forgiveness shown to the Sinful Woman is thus inextricably linked with the manifestation of God's divinity through the person of Jesus Christ. In these texts, this soteriological epiphany stands as one of the author's key theological emphases. The healing conferred through this incarnational manifestation requires the eye of faith, and this spiritual sight enables a transformation of the woman from a fundamentally physical being into an integrated person, healed from the mastery of her body. She is made whole and pure by the mastery of her body. The restoration offered to her by Jesus is comprehensive, and heals, rather than spurns as unworthy, the woman's physicality as well as her soul. The analogy between physical illness and mental or spiritual affliction has already been noted, and the

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[68] Trans McCarthy (1993) 7, 1, 129.
[69] John 20, 1–2 and 14–16.
[70] Trans McVey (1989) 12–15, 450.

juxtaposing of this story with that of the woman with an issue of blood reinforces this motif, given the ritual impurity attributed to menstrual blood in the Hebrew and Old Testament traditions. Both women's love and faith contribute to a typology of the mystery of salvation, with the visible redeeming the invisible, through the eye of faith. Symbolism and typology here are more than literary devices; they mirror the mystery of salvation, in which the invisible Godhead is manifested through His Incarnate Son.

The recurring motif in the Ephremic corpus of the analogy between sin and illness can be easily seen. It opens the *Homily on the Sinful Woman*,[71] and is echoed in the start of the second of the homilies edited by Graffin, which describes the longing of the invalid for health, and the parallel between this situation and that of the penitent sinner, who is 'sick from sin'.[72] This author attributes her suffering to her remembrance of her sins, which is worse than the superficial suffering of her shameful face. Jesus offers appropriate healing to those who seek him out[73] and calls on the faith of those who seek, be they leper, paralytic or sinner.[74]

This analogy is developed extensively in the case of the 'sinful woman' in that the physical attributes which had been used to charm her clients are the very instruments of her salvation. Her humanity is transformed through her correct use of her body.[75] The woman expresses her desire to repristinate her own body: 'The mouth that has kissed the lewd, forbid it not to kiss the body that remits transgressions and sins'.[76] Her body becomes the sacrifice of a contrite heart (Ps. 51.18), with tears flowing in place of blood, and the mortified flesh and skin represented by her hair, with which she wipes the feet of Jesus.[77] In washing Jesus' feet, she responds to 'the symbol of his incarnation',[78] but his dual nature is represented by his receiving

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[71] Trans Johnston (1995) 1, 336. There are many references in these homilies and in Ephrem's hymns to Jesus as the 'physician of souls', who offers the 'medicine of life', for example *Homily on our Lord*, 15, trans Johnston (1995) 311.

[72] Trans Graffin (1962) 2, 4, 197/9.

[73] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 8, 183.

[74] A comparison between the effective faith of the sinful woman and that of those in need of more purely physical healing is made in the homily translated by Sauget (1975/6) 64, 173.

[75] *Homily on our Lord*, 14, trans Johnston (1995), 310, cf. Sauget (1975–6) 33–36, 169, and 75–81, 174, and trans Brock (1988) 1, 42–51, 49–51.

[76] *Homily on the Sinful Woman*, trans Johnston (1995) 340.

[77] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 22 and 23, 191.

[78] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 19, p. 189, and note trans McCarthy (1993), Section

both physical and spiritual offerings, the table of food from the Pharisee, and the table of penitence from the woman.[79] The double nature of the offering is enforced through the comment that the Pharisee's pride caused him to invite Jesus to his table but not his heart. The woman, on the other hand, out of her penitent humility, offers her whole self to Jesus for his healing touch. The Pharisee's riches are purely those of the world, while her apparent poverty conceals the riches of her heart. So both the woman's physicality and Jesus' are brought out, to emphasise the fact that bodies alone are not problematic: in the case of Jesus, his corporeality is essential to his Incarnation; in the case of the woman, her body is in part the vehicle of her redemption.

The transformation granted by Christ is of the whole person, and this completeness is also seen in connection with the woman with the haemorrhage.[80] It is the woman's initiative which makes possible the gracious act of forgiveness, and the transformation is through the very actions she herself offers: through washing she is washed, and in washing something pure, she is herself purified.[81] The body of the 'sinful woman' is thus used appropriately now, and its integrity with her soul and mind means that she is sought out and healed in her totality. The Ephremic *Homily on our Lord* is explicit that Jesus uses the grief which accompanies the woman's actions to heal her particular wound of sin:

> These medicines the sinful woman offered to her Physician, that by her tears He might wash away her stains, by her kisses He might heal her wounds, by her sweet ointment He might make her evil name sweet as the odour of her ointment. This is the Physician who heals men by the medicines which they bring to Him.[82]

In other words, the woman has within her the source of her own healing. Her insight enables her to present herself to the physician as 'the gift which He calls secretly'.[83] Her repentance leads her to

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10(9), 170. Interpretations of Isaiah 6.2 suggest that, in the Semitic tradition, feet are symbolic of the genitals, although Peake (1919) coyly suggests that 'feet may simply mean the lower part of the body'. It is possible that this is alluded to here, to reiterate Jesus' humanity.

[79] Trans Sauget (1975–6) 41–42, 170, cf. trans Graffin (1962), 1, 9 and 10, 183–5.

[80] *Homily on our Lord*, 13, trans Johnston (1995) 310 and *Homily on the sinful woman*, 11, trans Johnston (1995) 339.

[81] Trans Sauget (1975–6) 40, 170.

[82] Trans Johnston (1995) 43, 324.

[83] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 11, 185.

experience grief at her sins, and also faith, both that she is worthy of forgiveness, and that Jesus has the power necessary to effect this restoration. The author's gloss on this aspect of the story is that the prophetic power of Jesus, which is questioned by the Pharisee, is demonstrated by the woman's movement from sinner to penitent, in silent supplication. This silence contrasts to the articulated dialogue between herself and Satan. Her belief that Jesus would know, without her speaking, why she wept, showed that she had 'the eye of faith.' This is 'the power that changed her'.[84] Her wisdom[85] and faith is contrasted to the blindness of the Pharisee, who in not recognizing Jesus to be a prophet, 'was himself proved not to know the Prophets' despite his learning.[86] Compare this with The *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 10(10), which notes:

> He brought the faith of this woman out into the open with praise, but unmasked the thoughts of Simon with reproach. He was a physician to her that believed, for it is he who heals everyone.[87]

In all these homilies, the contrast between the actions of the 'sinful woman' and the Pharisee are used as a model of the antithesis between insight and blindness, humility and arrogance, true and false love.[88] The hidden power of the eye of faith and the silence of the woman are an image of the secret powers of Christ, which enable him to understand the unspoken thoughts of a heart in need of healing. The desire, and ability, of Jesus to heal humanity reveals His divine power. His humanity makes it possible for those in need of healing (be it spiritual or physical) to approach the Godhead. In the first of the homilies edited by Graffin, this is pointed out by the use of transferred epithets. Jesus is seen as the one who 'thirsts' (like the Samaritan woman at the well),[89] for sinners to come to Him.[90] The language of hunger and thirst for a spiritual condition recalls the beatitudes'

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[84] Trans Johnston (1995) 43, 324.

[85] This quality is stressed in trans Graffin (1962) 1, 18, 189.

[86] *Homily on our Lord*, 42, trans Johnston (1995) 323, cf. trans Graffin (1962) 1, 11, 185.

[87] Trans McCarthy (1993) 171.

[88] See also trans Graffin (1962) 2, 23 and 24, 209.

[89] John 7.37 is also referred to in Ephrem's *Homily On our Lord*, in an image of the 'healing fountain' offered by Jesus to all sinners, trans Johnston (1995) 41, 323.

[90] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 7, 181. The author describes how she had been like stone, but through her penitence, now opens up from her soul 'the source of repentance'. See also trans McVey (1989), v. 4, 6, 378.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.' Portraying Jesus as one who craves in this way emphasizes his human attributes, which are used to divine ends, in that it is his desire to reconcile the sinner which effects the Incarnation and restores the lost image of God. The language of the beatitudes is also overtly used in *Hymn 26 on Virginity*, where the 'sinful woman', the woman with the haemorrhage and others are addressed as 'Blessed'. The human attribute of hunger is applied to Jesus to show how much He longed for the woman to be restored: 'Because of her who craved pardon, He wished himself to hunger at the table of Simon the Pharisee; just as under the cover of a table of bread, He had prepared for the sinful woman a table of penitence'.[91]

The reason given for Jesus accepting Simon's hospitality is that he hungers for the life of men, to recover his lost image.[92] This transfering of epithets continues with a overtly kenotic description of the woman 'emptying her soul' so that God can fill it, in contradistinction to the Pharisee who offers only a full table for Jesus to empty.[93] The sinful woman, seeking wholeness, is thus compared to God seeking to express his whole nature through the Incarnation. The brokenhearted sacrifice of herself is a reflection of Christ's self-sacrifice in the sacrament of the Divine Liturgy.

This homily is framed by references to God seeking out His lost image. It is subtitled 'God seeking out his creature and his image,' and at the end of the homily, the desire of God to reclaim his image is repeated.[94] In restoring the fallen to the image of God, grieving penitence becomes the embodiment of the healing offered by the embodied Lord. The healing is the outward manifestation of the inner state of sorrow for sins, which is itself grief at having lost the image of God.

The antithesis between inner/outer states of being is expressed by the dynamic between visible/invisible demonstrated in the Incarnation. The actions of the 'sinful woman' are described by the author of

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[91] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 5, 181. This homily also shares with Sauget's the image of the woman as an innocent lost sheep, in need of the Shepherd.

[92] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 6–7, 181.

[93] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 11, 185. The antithesis between the woman and the Pharisee is a recurring motif in this and the second homily edited by Graffin, in which it is stressed that his love for Jesus is purely human, whereas hers is more sanctified because she recognizes Him for who He really is, trans Graffin (1962) 2, 25, 209.

[94] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 25, 193.

Graffin's first homily as enabling the invisible to become visible, in order to help humanity understand the true nature of its saviour: 'it is because the eye of man cannot grasp His essence that God showed himself bodily in creation, so that those who could not see Him as God, could see Him in the man, with their bodily eye'.[95]

The feet which she bathes with her tears are 'the symbol of his incarnation'[96] and the relationship established between her and Jesus through this very human action gives her proof that he was truly man.[97] The second homily edited by Graffin devotes some space to the issue of Christ's accessibility to humanity being through his humanity, and various instances of his being received as God during His earthly ministry are cited, including the healing of the woman with the issue of blood.[98] The synthesis of human need/divine gift is brought out vividly in the relevant passage of Ephrem's *Commentary on the Diatessaron*:

> His humanity was washed by her tears and was refreshed, while his divinity granted redemption there and then for the price of her tears. Only his humanity was capable of being washed, whereas his divinity alone could expiate the sins which were not visible.[99]

In these homilies, the woman's faith, love and penitence are often the focus. The grief she expresses is very much the vehicle of her awakened conscience, rather than an end in itself. These Syriac texts are concerned with the involvement of her heart in this experience, the quality of the emotion she experiences at being so distanced from God. In arising from the heart, this grief is rooted in the centre of the human being, as understood by the Syrians. In these homilies, her outpouring of tears is simply described rather than analysed: 'she gave abundantly the tears from her eyes; there was in her heart a source of continual tears and in her soul, groanings without end'.[100]

The intimacy in the encounter between Jesus and the Sinful Woman brings out the relationship between human sin and the sufferings of Christ, whose death atones for sin. The juxtaposing of the anointing

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[95] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 18, 189, cf. *Hymn 27 on the Nativity*, 8, trans McVey (1989) 212: 'He showed the hidden by way of the revealed', and *Hymn 4 on Virginity*, 7, trans McVey (1989) 277.

[96] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 19, 189.

[97] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 19, 189.

[98] Trans Graffin (1962) 2, 28, 211 and 2, 32, 312.

[99] Section 10, 8, trans McCarthy (1993) 170.

[100] Trans Graffin (1962) 1, 27, 195.

at Bethany story reinforces this. Mourning for sin in these Syriac homilies is set in the context of God's desire to reconcile humanity, to offer healing through the salvation of Christ. The nature of the Syriac language lends itself to the use of antithesis, typology and symbolism which mirror the Biblical typology of Jesus as second Adam, the revelation of the hidden power of God. The grieving penitence of the Sinful Woman provides her with her own route to wholeness; her body, put to honourable use, is the vehicle for the healing of her soul. Despite a background of, at times, severe asceticism and abhorrence of the sexual function of the body, these homilies, in the hands of Ephrem and his imitators, reveal a most compassionate and constructive view of the 'sinful woman'. As a type for sinful humanity, she is to be identified with by every one. The love expressed by her for Jesus, and his loving response, is a more appropriate model for Christian discipleship than the uprightness of the Pharisee.

In their exegesis of this text, Ephrem and his school reinterpret womanhood as a crucial exemplum of redemption. In these homilies, female sexuality is presented as symbolic of all humanity's need for the healing offered by Christ. The woman's body becomes the instrument of her own healing, a symbol of the redemption afforded by the body of Christ, broken on the Cross and in the Holy Eucharist. The sterility of sin is replaced by the fecundity of penitence. The use of Mary typology thus goes far beyond the convention of women as exemplars of fallenness. In symbolising sinful humanity, the woman also symbolises the Mary who was the bearer of the Incarnate Christ, and the other Mary who was the first to seek him in his Risen Life. Her conscious acknowledgement of her need for healing enables her inner eye of faith to recognise the glory of Easter morning. The Sinful Woman's whole self is redeemed through the total love of Christ:

> By that thing by which she was lost, she was found, since she believed,
> so that triumphant was the mouth that had condemned her,
> and sanctified was the mouth that had defiled her,
> and purified was the beauty that had debased her.[101]

In parallel to the Mary typology, we see the use of first and second Adam typology. The soteriological power of Christ is revealed through his humanity, to which the Sinful Woman ministers. The forgiveness he offers is set in the context of the woman's total transformation

[101] *Hymn 35 on Virginity*, 6, trans McVey (1989) 417.

from sinner to one who has the inner eye. This enables her to recognize the prophetic and healing power of God, mediated through the Incarnation. Her own prophetic insight enables her to see the prophetic nature of her Saviour. In the hands of Ephrem, the typology of first and second Adam, Eva and Mary, constitute an insight into the mystery of salvation. In her penitence and remorseful tears, the Sinful Woman receives her own gift of healing, whilst at the same time demonstrating how such healing is available to all. The beauty of her inner grief is contrasted to the sullied nature of her physical behaviour. By contrast, the Pharisee's righteous demeanour articulates his lack of insight and love for Jesus.

In focusing on the image of sterile sin and fruitful penitence, Ephrem recalls the willing conception by Mary, whose immaculate womb brought forth the fruit which cleansed both the unclean womb of the woman with the haemorrhage and the promiscuous body of the Sinful Woman. It is, he suggests, only when both the inner and outer selves—metaphorical and physical—are integrated and offered for healing that salvation occurs. The catalyst to this process of integration and externalisation is penitent grief, articulated by wordless tears. The integration of physical and non-physical in the restoration of the penitent is directly parallel to the dual nature of Christ, whose Divinity is only fully manifested through His Incarnate presence.

Ephrem's focus on this text, and the emphases he places on it, thus comment not only on the process of salvation through penitence as experienced by this woman. Through the typology and the anointing symbolism he reveals his own understanding of the primacy of the Incarnation as an expression of God's mercy. The unity of the healed woman is an image of the unity of God. Her loving ministry to his Son is the mirror of God's mercy to humanity, who seeks to restore his image in mankind. In the mystical encounter between the woman and her Lord, her penitent tears do more than wash away her sins. Her grief transforms her whole self into a worthy companion for the Christ whose feet she washes.

SECTION IV

'THAT SWEET LIFE-RESTORING SORROW OF WHICH THE APOSTLE SPOKE:' ISAAC OF NINEVEH'S TEACHINGS ON TEARS OF REPENTANCE

CHAPTER SIX

THE SITZ IM LEBEN OF ISAAC

In the homilies of Ephrem and his followers, the concept of spiritual tears is explored in the context of the sinful woman as Everywoman, who represents the grieving penitence of all humanity. Ephrem writes for and about women, and uses the tears of the penitent woman as a symbol of redemptive potential. Her grief is the fertility which replaces the barrenness of sin. Isaac, by contrast, addresses a classic monastic audience, one from which women are specifically excluded. As far as he is concerned, 'It is better for you to eat deadly poison than to eat with a woman':[1] even the holiest of women poses a threat to purity and solitude.[2] In his *Homilies*, the process of mourning for sins and the tears which express it are described as the prerogative of the monk, and can only be shared by those who are willing to adopt the monastic model of life. In defining the monk's identity as a mourner, Isaac implies the laity, distracted as it is by worldly concerns, is incapable of this degree of spiritual maturity. It is only when approaching the appropriate state of spiritual advancement that tears will be granted.

Writing probably some three hundred and fifty years after Ephrem, Isaac springs from a radically different world context, and employs a different style of writing. Ephrem's markedly symbolic, biblical mode of operating, with its typology and poetic mode of expression, has become superimposed by the ideas and thought patterns of Hellenism. In Isaac, Biblical references are allusive rather than overt. Wensinck attributes this shift in emphasis to the influence of the Stoics and the Alexandrian school. He sees in Isaac the influence of Philo's allegorical interpretation of Scripture, which for Isaac is his 'textbook' which he interprets allegorically: he 'simply uses the Bible and Christian

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[1] *Homily 17*, trans Miller (1984) 95.

[2] 'If you are forced to speak with women, turn your face from the sight of them, and talk with them thus. But as from fire, as from the snare of the devil, keep yourself from nuns . . . lest your heart be chilled from the love of God, and you pollute your heart with the mire of the passions.' *Homily 17*, trans Miller (1984) 94–5.

dogma as a means to support his own ideas by an outward authority'.[3] Wensinck argues that Isaac depends on these sources not only for his thinking, but also in the forms he uses, such as sentences. Since brief aphorisms are a common format throughout aesthetic writings in the Eastern Church, it is as likely that Isaac drew on the Book of Proverbs as a model as that he was inspired by any classical Greek forms.

In addition to the Bible and the Attic tradition, Isaac draws on more contemporary religious thinkers. Pseudo-Dionysius is one major extra-Biblical influence on his thought, and Dinoysian thought features prominently in Isaac's writing, both by actual citation,[4] and through the use of various tripartite hierarchies. Isaac's use of tripartite models also owes something to John the Solitary (John of Apamea), who propounds a tripartite model for spiritual growth, and this will be examined in the context of Isaac's own thoughts on the issue. However, Isaac does not restrict himself to tripartite hierarchies. In *The Second Part*, Isaac mentions 'four different kinds of reflection on salvation' of which the last is divided into three distinct parts.[5] Evagrios' teachings on aspects of the ascetic life can also be traced in Isaac, and this important connection would certainly provide material for a detailed study in its own right. As evidence of the centrality of this link, Bamberger[6] claims that the translation of Isaac's homilies into Greek contributed to the rehabilitation of Evagrios (minus his more Origenistic speculations) within the Orthodox church.

Evidence about the likely dates of Isaac's life and writings is hazy. Two ancient biographies offer some evidence.[7] The first clue seized on by biographers is Isaac's own reference to writing six thousand years after the demons,[8] a concept discussed in the introduction to the collected *Homilies*.[9] Isaac may therefore have been writing about AD 492,[10] though the translator points out that other internal evidence suggests he must have been much later than this. It is believed that

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[3] (1923) xxiv, xxv and xlvi ff.
[4] *Homily 26*, trans Miller (1984) 129 and 131.
[5] X,1ff., Brock (1995) 25.
[6] Trans (1972), liii–liv.
[7] The first is the anonymous account in *Ktobo dnakfuto*, French trans Chabot (1896) 277–278. A Syriac edition may be found in trans Bedjan (1901) 508, no. 125. The second account is that published with Latin translation by Patriarch Ignatius E. Rahmani, in Chabot (1904), 32–3. Both accounts may be found in trans Miller (1984) lxv–vi, and also in trans Wensinck (1923).
[8] *Homily 54*, trans Miller (1984) 269.
[9] Trans Miller (1984) lxiii ff.
[10] Trans Miller (1984) lxiii, lxiv.

his reputation led to him being requested by George the Katholikos, of Beit 'Abe, to act as bishop in Nineveh, which post he held for only five months. This event would place his life some considerable time later than the end of the fifth century, and the seventh century is the normal choice. If this dating is accepted, given the fraught conditions between the Bishops of Qatar and Tigris-Euphrates in the middle of the seventh century,[11] Isaac's appointment reads like a political move. The brevity of his tenure may likewise have involved political reasons, or have risen because of Isaac's disinclination for polemical debate, such as the continuing question of the Monophysites. Isaac's biographers give a more obviously hagiographic interpretation of events: Isho' Denah[12] says the reason is 'known only to God'. Another commentator attributes it to his personality and asceticism, suggesting that 'because of the acuteness of his intellect and his zeal, he could only endure the pastoral care of his city for five months; then he had to return to his stillness'.[13] Certainly, his account of despair about the impiety of a plaintif[14] is read by his biographers as an example of his sensitivity to the demands of the world. The texts reveal a strong desire for *ihidayutha*, which would have been incompatible with a prolonged excursus into the public domain.

Less reliably demonstrated are various possible doctrinal differences between Isaac and his contemporaries, to do with allegations of Nestorianism,[15] and Origenism. Hansbury deduces from the available evidence that 'the problem is Isaac's insistence on the primacy of mercy,' which even included the possibility of salvation for the demons, as part of God's creation,[16] an essentially Origenistic standpoint. The importance to Isaac of God's love and righteous wrath, and man's corresponding love and fear, is explored below. Whatever Isaac's motive in relinquishing his episcopal duties, it must have been compelling, as Isaac does not condone surrender in the face of adversity.[17]

At some stage in his life, Isaac composed a great number of homilies. His insistence on the need to write from considerable experience of a subject may suggest that he wrote them in at the end of his life,

[11] Trans Miller (1984) lxviii and also the epilogue, 481–541.
[12] Trans Chabot (1896) 63–4.
[13] Trans Miller (1984) lxv–vi.
[14] Trans Miller (1984) lxviii–ix.
[15] Trans Miller (1984) xxxviii–ix.
[16] Trans (1989) 11, 12.
[17] Trans Miller (1984) lxix.

an interpretation favoured by Wensinck.[18] On the other hand, he is reputed to have gone blind through having read so much, as attested by 'the surname of the second Didymus'[19] and the amanuensis employed in his old age may have recorded not only recent but earlier homilies. The imperative of writing only from experience is one of two patristic conventions observed by Isaac and his biographers,[20] the other being reluctance to commit his wisdom to paper. In *Homily 18*, he mentions his reluctance to boast about his labours, but acknowledges that since it may be 'to the profit' of others, 'I must not (as it seems to me, at least) shirk the task of writing them down'.[21]

Isaac draws on his experience of the solitary life, a condition he saw as the ideal path to choose.[22] For Isaac, experience of stillness and solitude was the only valid reason for writing advice to others, and he only addresses (overtly) those who were already committed to such a life, as he states in *Homily 65*:

> And this is the aim of this epistle: that you learn what is the life of stillness, what is its work, what mysteries are concealed in this discipline [mysteries that are hidden from many] . . . From the understanding of these things and because of what they find in this epistle, men will call blessed the solitaries who pass their lives in this world by remaining concentrated and by themselves. But to those who have no acquaintance with these matters, this instruction, with all its admonitions, about the stages that are in stillness will be superfluous. I write here to wise men, and I offer advice with love.[23]

He did not value an ability to write cleverly about things which had not been experienced.[24] Isaac distinguishes between the wisdom of the hermit, shared with his disciples, and that of the teacher of secular issues: to be primarily a teacher is to engage in worldly activity and risk becoming divorced from the spiritual life, so, in Isaac's book, a 'great sage and a teacher', no matter how blessed with achievement, can have nothing to teach about the life of stillness.[25]

Chief among the spiritual experiences of which he writes is weep-

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[18] Trans (1923) xvi. Pages xvii–xxiii give Wensinck's own account of Isaac's life.
[19] Rahmani, quoted trans Wensinck (1923) xix.
[20] Trans Miller (1984) xxvii.
[21] *Homily 18*, trans Miller (1984) 97.
[22] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 169.
[23] *Homily 65*, trans Miller (1984) 319.
[24] 'Love uncouthness of speech joined with knowledge from inner experience more that to spill forth rivers of instruction from the keenness of your mind and from a deposit of hearsay and writings of ink.' *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 32.
[25] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 308, cf. *Homily 1*, 38, trans Miller (1984) 8.

ing for sins, of which he claims to know about, both from experience and 'according to what I have understood from both the divine vision of the Scriptures and from true mouths'.[26]

Wensinck notes that, in common with St. Paul, to whom Isaac refers in this homily, and, as noted elsewhere here, Symeon the New Theologian, Isaac uses the elliptical expression of personal experience 'I knew a man who . . .'[27] It is not just the literary style of St. Paul's writings which influenced Isaac, but also aspects of his theology, especially his understanding of the nature of humanity and its relation to God.

As already suggested, Isaac's anthropology underpins the primacy of mourning within his writings. For Isaac, mourning is inextricably linked to an understanding of what it is to be a human being, made in God's image. This is his starting point. Isaac extrapolates from his findings the image of the monk (renouncing human society in favour of God's), as an ideal for humanity. Much of Isaac's anthropology hangs on the tension between encratism and the integrity of the human person. His acceptance of the indivisible relationship between body and soul is challenged by some very negative attitudes to the body. The issue is further confused by his insistence that the body be used fully in prayer. At times, Isaac loses the sense of balance between these conflicting demands, but taken as a whole it is what Mascia terms 'this pneumo-psychomatic interplay'[28] between the various aspects of the human person which is the locus of penitent grief.

Having considered the anthropology of the person who mourns, Isaac places him/her within a theological and spiritual structure which has its own hierarchies. Participation in mourning indicates the particular stages of attainment in the spiritual progression towards perfection. At the apex of all hierarchies is God, and man's response to God is shown, according to Isaac, by an appropriate enactment of the two great commandments, to love God and one another. Mourning constitutes both: it is participation in the sufferings of both Christ and fellow humanity. To love is to suffer, and the love which is due to God is experienced in conjunction with fear of God. Both this love and fear are prompts to penitence: this is the basis of all Christian discipleship, and clearly laid out in the monastic tradition throughout late antiquity. Love and fear are the natural response of God's creature

[26] Trans Miller (1984) 83.
[27] *Additional Homily 3*, trans Miller (1984) 392.
[28] T (1979) 255.

to his mercy, and his righteous anger. Isaac focuses on the specifically monastic working out of the dynamic between human and divine love. On a day to day basis, humility and silence are the mothers of mourning. Repentance is its human articulation. The penitent man, God's creature of flesh and spirit, becomes symbolized by the person of the monk, whose daily work of love and grief defines him as mourner.

Before looking at the details of how Isaac expounds his thoughts on grief for sin, let us outline the manuscript tradition. Bedjan's Syriac text[29] remains the authoritative source of 82 of the *Homilies*, which effectively forms Part I of Isaac's work. These were translated into Greek in the ninth century, by Patricuis and Abraham of the Mar Saba Monastery. The Syriac text was translated into English in 1923 by Wensinck, who provides a scholarly appraisal of the Syriac manuscript tradition[30] whilst acknowledging his own struggle to produce a lucid translation.[31] Despite the impenetrability of its language, this remained the sole English translation of these homilies until a revision produced in 1984, from (predominantly) Greek manuscript sources, by D. Miller from the Holy Transfiguration Monastery.[32] Contemporary and subsequent accounts of the life of Isaac refer to many more than one volume of writings. Isho'denah mentions many texts; the anonymous author of the other *Vita* specifically mentions 'five volumes of instructions for monks'[33] and Abdisho of Nisibis, writing in the 13th century, claims there were no less than 'seven volumes on the spiritual discipline, on divine mysteries, on judgements, and on providence'.[34] A translation of some verses from *The Book of Grace* may be found in Miller's edition of the *Homilies*. 1995 saw the publication of a translation by Sebastian Brock of some of the remaining Homilies, known as *The Second Part*:[35] Bedjan was aware of these but in his day they were lost. Brock's discovery of them in 1983 has provided material for not only his translation of chapters 4–41, but other projected partial translations, for example that by Bettiolo of chapters 1–3, as yet unpublished. From these sources a wealth of evidence can be retrieved about this complex and intense exponent of the Syrian mourner.

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[29] (1909).
[30] lxxvii–viii.
[31] Trans (1923) *Preface*, i–vi.
[32] Trans Miller (1984).
[33] Rahmani (1904) 32–33, 33, quoted Wensinck (1923) xix.
[34] Assemani (1719) III,1, 104, quoted trans Miller (1984) lxxiii.
[35] *Chapters IV–XLI*, CSCO 554–5, *Scriptores Syri* 224–5 (1995). Part of this had appeared in Ross, 1987 (ii).

CHAPTER SEVEN

ENCRATISM AND HUMAN INTEGRITY

On the battle-ground of the body, Isaac fights a war of attrition between condemnation of fleshly desires and a need to accept the body as a vehicle for salvation. Moderation receives only a passing affirmation;[1] continual striving for excellence is the norm. Discernment is commended as a chief virtue,[2] and that which enables the penitent to progress.[3] Isaac's anthropological and theological thought is peppered with triadic structures; he sees a tripartite division of the soul, another of the human person. He talks of three stages of knowledge, which reflect the various levels of spiritual awareness. Khalife-Hachem believes that the three stages of gnosis correspond to the three aspects of the human person.[4] Close analysis of Isaac's texts, however, reveals a more complex relationship, since although Isaac employs much structure and definition in his work, he is not primarily motivated by a thorough systematic analysis of his subject, more by a desire to share the theological insights that have arisen from his experience. Isaac does identify three stages in the mystic route, repentance, purity and perfection. Godly grief and tears may appear at various points along this journey, and even give some indication of how advanced the mourner is on his/her spiritual progress. However, Isaac does not consistently locate tears exclusively in one or other level of the zspiritual ascent.

Of the plethora of anthropological themes in his writings, three are particularly pertinent in this context: the tripartite divisions within human nature, the superiority of the pneumatic aspect of humanity over its bodily and psychic elements, and the imperative that spiritual activity should involve the body.

Isaac's fundamental description of the human person is that it comprises body, life force and the soul or spirit, a division into corporeal, psychic and pneumatic which follows conventional monastic

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[1] *Homily 1*, 33, trans Miller (1984) 7, cf. *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 35 'When you find honey, partake of it with measure'.
[2] *Homily 17*, trans Miller (1984) 93.
[3] *Homily 16*, trans Miller (1984) 90.
[4] (1970/1) 2043.

lines. Each aspect is superior to the former one. Isaac's perception of the soul is further divided, usually into three stages.[5] At times, he makes specific reference to the Platonic concept of the soul, using terms such as 'the appetitive part of the soul'[6] and 'the irrascible faculty that exists by nature in the soul'.[7] Elsewhere he evolves his own definition, which subdivides the existing Platonic model:

> Every rational nature that has been constituted to receive divine teaching has been established in its own particular way out of three basic parts by the wisdom of the glorious Creator: these are, desire, zeal and reason . . . These first two parts are collectively called the active part of the soul, whereas this other (part) is (called) divine contemplation.[8]

The hierarchy of these three parts is elsewhere described in relation to what is natural:

> "What is the natural state of the soul, what is the state contrary to nature, and what is the state above nature?" *Answer*; "The natural state of the soul is understanding of God's creatures, both sensory and noetic. The supernatural state of the soul is her movement in the divine vision of the transubstantial Deity. The contranatural state of the soul is her being moved by the passions."[9]

It is not clear whether by 'rational nature' Isaac means the souls of all humanity, or only an elect (the 'supernatural') who have been deemed worthy of receiving 'divine teaching.' It is apparent, however, that the degree to which a person can become enlightened depends on their achieving this ultimate state of the highest of the three levels of human existence. The person who operates at this last level 'stands in the knowledge and joy which is in God, seeing that he has become a sharer in the mystery of God'.[10] In other words, the spiritually enlightened one has developed, to the highest possible level, the highest part of their human nature. Isaac describes here a hierarchy within a hierarchy. In acting 'naturally', Isaac suggests, we are fulfilling the God-given potential within us. This includes the action of the will to choose 'the better part', and this Isaac urges his reader to do.

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[5] For example, 'the threefold and principal purity of the parts [of the soul]', *Homily 22*, trans Miller (1984) 113.
[6] *Homily 66*, trans Miller (1984) 325.
[7] *Second Part*, XVII, 1, trans Brock (1995) 63.
[8] *Second Part*, XIX, 1, 5, trans Brock (1995) 72/3.
[9] *Homily 3*, trans Miller (1984) 17–8.
[10] *Second Part*, XX, 13–15, trans Brock (1995) 74 and 77.

Having established the component parts of humanity, and the potential for spiritual growth, Isaac asserts the superiority of the spirit. Because the structure of the human person is viewed as a hierarchy, this ultimate stage of spiritual development depends on the correct conditioning of the subordinate parts. Purification of the mind and soul therefore depends on the prior purification of the body:

> Discipline performed by the body in stillness purifies the body of the [unclean] matter within it. But the discipline of the mind humbles the soul. . . . and draws her from the state where the thoughts are passionately engrossed to the state where they are moved by her divine vision . . . spiritual discipline is an activity apart from the senses. This is the discipline written about by the Fathers, namely that whenever the intellects of the saints receive hypostatic theoria, then even the body's grossness is taken away, and from thenceforth their vision becomes spiritual.[11]

It is only by 'shunning the body'[12] and the desire for worldly possessions[13] that one can enter into noetic battle. This purification is thus a figurative death of the body, akin to the Pauline concept of the daily dying to sin, or, as Isaac puts it, 'The Holy Spirit forces [the body] to die, for He knows that if it does not die, it will not vanquish sin'.[14] God's saints give an example to follow.[15] The superior state of gnosis is achieved by sacrificing the lower, corporeal condition. Isaac uses the image of the first Adam, asserting that continual endeavours to uproot the old Adam will realise the potential planted in us by God.[16] He cites the injunction to first put off the old man and then put on the new.[17] Isaac's debt to St. Paul is further evidenced by his citation of Paul as an example of one who wept unceasingly in his recognition of the folly and depravity of humanity. These tears he describes as both being *born* of such thoughts, and also *constitutive* of new life, as it is 'Through this mourning he becomes dead to all transitory things and anxiety over them, and all the passions of the soul and body become dead in him'.[18]

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[11] *Homily 43*, trans Miller (1984) 213–4.
[12] *Homily 3*, trans Miller (1984) 27.
[13] *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 30; cf. *Homily 15*, trans Miller (1984) 86.
[14] *Homily 38*, trans Miller (1984) 187.
[15] *Homily 2*, trans Miller (1984) 15; cf. *Homily 15*, trans Miller (1984) 88.
[16] *Homily 29*, trans Miller (1984) 143.
[17] *Additional Homily V*, trans Miller (1984) 395.
[18] *Additional homily II*, trans Miller (1984) 389.

Having put off the old man, the next step is to purify the heart,[19] through unceasing labours. This labour starts with bodily disciplines of fasting and vigil, progresses to an intermediate state of purity of mind and finally achieves purity of heart. Isaac describes these as distinct states, and stresses that the more effort that is put into attaining each stage, the more enduring it will be.[20]

Isaac's concept of spiritual progression starts with the body. He is, as we have seen, adamant that the body and its desires must be sacrificed in order to achieve the purity needed for luminosity of mind. Yet scrutiny of his teachings on prayer reveals a certain ambivalence. Isaac is equally adamant that in prayer, the body must be used in conjunction with the mind and spirit. To fail to do this confers 'no advantage';[21] indeed, prayer which does not involve the body is incomplete and cannot bear fruit, like an aborted fœtus.[22] This very incarnate image is also found when he talks of the importance of beginning the spiritual journey correctly, with silence. To fail to do so renders one:

> devoid of knowledge and hope alike a formless being, one that has not reached perfection through the reception of a soul because it has not completed its period of gestation in the womb and gained the maturity of formed life.[23]

The means by which the integrity of body and soul may be achieved, and the reasons for it, are outlined by Isaac, and include an emphasis on monastic disciplines such as repetition and prostrations. They may invoke the gracious gift of tears. Repetition forms a discipline which helps eradicate individualism and self-indulgence. Scripture is invoked as the authority for these actions. This lays down a common standard to which monks should adhere, and discourages the use of 'their own rules and special customs which they had laid down for themselves according to whim'.[24] This individualism is seen by Isaac as more erroneous than the practice of omitting certain psalms.[25] The Fathers

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[19] *Homily 2*, trans Miller (1984) 13–4. This phrase recurs in *Additional Homily V*, trans Miller (1984) 395.

[20] *Homily 3*, trans Miller (1984) 21–2.

[21] *Second Part*, XXI, trans Brock (1995) 85–6.

[22] *Homily 21*, trans Miller (1984) 107.

[23] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 312.

[24] *Second Part*, XIV, 42, trans Brock (1995) 56.

[25] There are many references to the acceptability of omitting psalms, if such omission arises from gracious piety, not laziness or 'as a result of a corrupted Messalian mentality' *Second Part*, XIV, 47, trans Brock (1995) 58.

taught Isaac that humility of soul was achieved by 'real acts of worship'[26] employing the body:

> Each time they stood up, they performed many acts of worship, their body assisting them as the occasion might allow, kissing the Cross five or maybe ten times, reckoning each act of worship and kiss as a single prayer.[27]

These actions, although distinct from the action of the heart, are seen as desirable. This activity of *latreia* is God's due, and the right offering of contrite hearts. The discipline of the body catalyses the activities of the higher levels of the human person, and may even lead to tears, as Isaac suggests, in an graphic passage full of verbs describing the body involved actively in prayer:

> It often happens that when a man bends his knees in prayer and stretches forth his hand to the heavens, fixing his eyes upon the Cross of Christ and concentrating all his thoughts on God during his prayer, beseeching God all the while with tears and compunction, suddenly and without warning a fountain springs up in his heart gushing forth sweetness.[28]

Correct bodily habits are not the only reasons Isaac gives for humble posture. God ordained physical postures of humility in order to inspire his praise, but he does not need them for himself. The main benefit is to the person who is using his/her body to pray. Isaac mentions 'the toil of kneeling' as one of the disciplines which leads to luminosity of mind.[29] Physical humility reflects the inner process, Isaac says, and the correct response to the presence in the heart of compunction, as a gift from God, is to 'give yourself over to unremitting bows and prostrations'.[30]

Physical prostrations and other gestures remind the penitent of the physical incarnation of the Redeemer,[31] whose love for humanity was demonstrated by sharing their fleshly form. By using the body in all humility and purity, the supplicant makes the prayer his/her own, not out of the individualism Isaac condemns, but because the body is intrinsically part of each person. Isaac describes how the words

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[26] *Second Part*, XIV, 24, trans Brock (1995) 51.
[27] *Second Part*, XIV, 24, trans Brock (1995) 51.
[28] *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 39.
[29] *Second Part*, XXXI, 6, trans Brock (1995) 98.
[30] *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 38.
[31] *Second Part*, XIV, 13, trans Brock (1995) 47–8.

of the psalms, which form the prayers, may be transformed through the profound engagement of the penitent with the words and feelings aroused: again, the clear indication of physical postures and sensations is noticeable:

> Most prayers . . . consist of words chosen from psalms containing ideas and sentiments of grief and supplication, or of thanksgiving and praise, etc. Thus sometimes when someone is kneeling with his face bowed, or has his fingers and gaze raised to heaven, he will add (his own) feeling to the words and repeat them slowly. On occasion the suffering and pain of his heart will cause all sorts of deeply-felt words of prayer to spring up, or joy may burst forth in response to something, stirring that person to alter his prayer to praises owing to the delight his mind feels.[32]

In other words, the verbal content of the prayer suggests an appropriate physical posture, which in turn effects an actual experience of the pure emotions suggested by the prayer. The form and content of the prayer become a single unity. When pure prayer is taking place 'she will take the place of your office . . . for the fullness of prayer is the gift of tears'.[33] Such tears are for Isaac no metaphorical event, they flow as 'torrents of tears, so much so that they will wash your cheeks by their abundance'.[34]

At this stage of ecstatic incorporation, tears take the place of words. The charism of a 'profusion of tears' is accompanied by what he describes as 'a sort of insight [which] lingers on many hours, as a person lies prostrate on his face; they are overcome by one of those altered state which belong to the gift of purity of prayer'.[35]

Elsewhere, Isaac commends the 'excellent altered state' of one who fails to complete his psalms because he has become a 'fountain of weeping . . . he is drenched in tears . . . in his stillness tears burst forth and soak his face, owing to the wondrous insights he has'.[36]

The body which is caught up in prayer is able to experience pure emotions of holy joy and sadness. These are quite distinct from the illusions of other passions, because they are focused on, and inspired by, God:

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[32] *Second Part*, XIV, 43, trans Brock (1995) 57.
[33] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 307.
[34] *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 34: cf. *Homily 68*, trans Miller (1984) 331.
[35] *Second Part*, XIV, 27, trans Brock (1995) 52.
[36] *Second Part*, XIV, 46,47, trans Brock (1995) 58.

> In the ministry of the mind, the body is not without labour either . . . for sufficient for the body is the warmth that comes from the flame of joy that continually takes hold of it, and through that sweet life-restoring sorrow of which the Apostle spoke . . . *grief for the sake of God, or joy at Him*, and a heart that is diffused with the hope for which it is continually peering out.[37] (my italics)

For Isaac, physical experiences in prayer are the mark of its purity. A prayer which can transcend the handicap of physicality is powerful indeed. Pure prayer is attained by the highest level of spiritual development, which requires the body to be purged of impurity. Discipline of body and mind arouses the heart, such that:

> these stirrings issue forth for him in his prayer (in the form of) pure and forceful prayers, densely-packed and gushing forth in their impetus: they are in the inmost part of the heart, and are accompanied by an unswerving gaze directed towards our Lord. *It seems to that person that it is in his very body that he is approaching our Lord at that time*, because of the sincerity of the prayer's thoughts which rise up for him.[38] (my italics)

In other words, the purest prayer constitutes incorporation into the life of Christ, active participation in the adoration offered by all creation. Prayer at this level suspends soul and body in a state of *hesychia*,[39] and tears, which have indicated the presence of arriving at pure prayer, are now left behind, because 'Besides tears, you should not ask any other manifest sign from the body', he writes, describing an apophatic condition: 'when the mind is exalted above created things, the body also takes leave of tears'.[40]

There is a circular movement of Isaac's anthropology: the body having been purified, the heart is pricked with contrition, and tears of remorse fall. As these tears further cleanse the person who sheds them, they may move to a state so purified and unified that they cease even to weep.

This anthropological structure is the basis for Isaac's teachings on how mourning for sin may be attained, what its fruits are, and certain specific spiritual conditions. Isaac is quite specific about the nature of

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[37] *Homily 14*, trans Miller (1984) 82.

[38] *Second Part*, XXXII, 1, trans Brock (1995) 100.

[39] The definition given in *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, 365 of this key term translates it as stillness, 'a state of inner tranquillity or mental quietude and concentration which arises in conjunction with, and is deepened by, the practice of pure prayer and the guarding of the heart'.

[40] *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 34.

spiritual grief, and the circumstances and practices which predispose mourning for sin. He employs vivid, graphic language to illustrate his teachings, and his main concerns are repeated throughout his writings. Isaac's homilies reveal a complex understanding of spiritual and human anthropology, the motives which prompt people to seek spiritual growth, and the nature of the interchange between divine grace and human penitence. In other words, he looks at both the person who mourns, and the process and nature of that grief. This contrasts strongly to, for example, Symeon, who focuses much more on the tears themselves, and their spiritual weight. The many *Homilies* provide a huge amount of material, so a synopsis of Isaac's definitions of spiritual mourning and contrition may help set the scene.

Mourning for sin is the fruit of much spiritual labour. The vision of God, so desired by the Christian, is only granted to the entirety of a person: it is not a partial, but a total transformation. This accords with the very Pauline understanding Isaac has of the nature of man and his relation to God. Grieving for sin is a transfiguration experience. The spiritual benefits which accrue from this disciplined engagement of body and mind, have emphatically physical expression. Contrition is experienced as 'bursting forth from the heart and ascending to the head, gripping the eyes and nose'.[41] The tears which are granted during prayer involve every aspect of the person; his body becomes like a fountain of weeping which drenches him; he may groan or conversely his 'tongue being silenced because of some particular joy' tears 'burst forth and soak his face, owing to the wondrous insights he has, while his soul exults and is filled with an indescribable hope'.[42]

At the same time, the subordinate role of the body must not be forgotten: it acts as a vehicle for the work of the mind, and its labours are thus inferior. Isaac asserts that 'psalmody recited with a wandering mind is more profitable than labour of the body. Sorrow of mind is superior to bodily toil'.[43] But the hierarchy of body and soul becomes less distinct during the ecstatic experience of 'wondrous insights', as the penitent becomes a closer copy of the mystical unity of God.

In Section XVIII of the *Second Part*, Isaac provides an analysis of the causes of perpetual weeping. The focus of this text on mourning

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[41] *Book of Grace*, 4, 21, trans Miller (1984) 408.
[42] *Second Part*, XIV, 46, trans Brock (1995) 58.
[43] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 308; cf. *Homily 51*, trans Miller (1984) 248 'Sorrow of mind suffices to take the place of bodily labour'.

lends a beguiling sense of deliberation, but it must be remembered that systematisation is not Isaac's prime concern. In this text, Isaac affirms the need for discernment, and a conscious engagement with the life of the spirit. He also enumerates three causes for tears which derive from the general monastic quality of 'stillness'.[44] The first reason he gives is 'wonder at the insights full of mysteries that are revealed all the time to the intellect'.[45] This causes involuntary tears to flow without any sense of fatigue, the intellect being strengthened by sweetness. These insights are 'a type of the manna which the Children of Israel ate'.

Secondly, tears may arise 'from a fervent love of God which inflames the soul', and then the mourner 'cannot endure (any longer) without weeping continually as a result of its sweetness and delight'.[46] Whereas the first reason given is one of intellectual and spiritual recognition of God's mercy (the words 'insights' and 'intellect' recur throughout the section), this second reason is more the movement of the heart, an awed love of God which is purer than its human, romantic counterpart, an experience of the emotions, not just the intellect.

Thirdly, tears flow from a sense of humility, which, typically, Isaac subdivides as having two possible sources, being 'either as a result of a precise knowledge of one's sins; or as a result of recollecting the lowliness of our Lord—or rather, as a result of recollecting the greatness of God: to what extent the greatness of the Lord of all lowered itself'.[47] The person who engages with the sufferings of Christ, seeking to imitate his humility, is returning to the Father. Their tears are an image of the Land of Promise, when they arise from an awareness of 'the sweetness of the charisms and consolations of [being] humble for the Lord's sake'.[48]

Once the necessary spiritual groundwork has been prepared, the fruits of tears will appear.[49] At this stage of spiritual development, they are joyful, sweet and warm,[50] unlike the searing and painfully enforced tears of the earlier stages of the spiritual ascent. The advent

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[44] *Second Part*, XVIII, 16, trans Brock (1995) 70.
[45] *Second Part*, XVIII, 4, trans Brock (1995) 67.
[46] *Second Part*, XVIII, 5, trans Brock (1995) 67.
[47] *Second Part*, XVIII, 6, trans Brock (1995) 67. The passage continues by mentioning the suffering of Christ on our behalf.
[48] *Second Part*, XVIII, 11, trans Brock (1995) 69.
[49] Isaac uses the image of tears being fruits in several instances, e.g. *Homily 14*, trans Miller (1984) 82.
[50] *Book of Grace*, 4, 21, trans Miller (1984) 408.

of continual, sweet weeping marks the entry into perfect peace and tranquillity, a state Isaac describes as 'peace of thought', which leads to 'the rest of which Saint Paul has spoken, only in part, however, and to the extent that nature can contain it'.[51] This transition is described as instantaneous:

> Then straightway, like a man who has encountered the light, he casts off the oppression of his sorrow and great joy stirs within him, as in a man who has found true and excellent hope.[52]

Fear and love of God, described as awe and fervour, are the basis of mourning for sin. Allied to these emotions is the imperative for a conscious, deliberate engagement with the work of repentance. The human conscience is pricked, and smarts at its awakening. The medicines which Isaac offers are the balm of humility and silence, which move the soul towards a state of repentance, all essential aspects of the life of *ihiyadutha*.

The enormous value of stilled silence in the spiritual journey is frequently mentioned by Isaac. It is the 'harbour of mercies'[53] to which one steers from the outset of the journey.[54] He lists a humble heart as one of the 'three causes of tears'.[55] Humility is the medicine which 'will heal and set aright all these things'.[56] It is sustained by daily suffering which renders the soul limpid and pure,[57] through the sharing in other people's sorrows, as mentioned above. Both humility and silence, like the tears to which they are the midwife, mark the point of transition, when the soul is reborn out of darkness. This spiritual rebirth is accompanied by copious tears, 'like a freely flowing torrent', a gift which 'mingles' and 'joins' every aspect of the monk's life (reading, prayer, psalmody, reflection, eating and drinking).[58]

The condition of *hesychia* is characterised, as well as effected, by the disciplined acquisition of silence and humility. Such restraint purifies the soul and prepares her to move from the state where the thoughts are 'passionately engrossed 'to one in which 'they are moved

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[51] *Homily 14*, trans Miller (1984) 83.
[52] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 166.
[53] *Second Part*, XVIII, 19, trans Brock (1995) 71.
[54] *Homily 65*, trans Miller (1984) 319.
[55] *Second Part*, XVIII, 16, trans Brock (1995) 70.
[56] *Second Part*, XXVI, 4, trans Brock (1995) 88.
[57] *Homily 57*, trans Miller (1984) 283.
[58] *Homily 6*, trans Miller (1984) 60.

by her divine vision'.[59] Primarily, tears arise from acquiring stillness, and Isaac even mentions a time span for this process:

> Whoever has found the reality of these things truly and accurately has found it in stillness. The eyes of such a man become like fountains of water for two years' time or even more [that is, during the time of transition: I mean of mystical transition].[60]

One who has not yet attained this stage of the spiritual life will not weep, because the person is 'bereft of the things which cause tears'.[61] Stillness, in turn, requires much spiritual labour, in which fervent prayer takes precedence over psalmody.[62] The discipline of reciting psalms and saying set forms of prayer is encouraged as a useful discipline in itself, and an essential engagement with Scripture, but it is subservient to the state of ecstasy to which prayer may lead. Being distracted from the Office by the gift of tears is an 'excellent altered state . . . something which the majority of rightminded brethren experience'.[63]

Such contrition derives from a deliberate process of inner examination, a humility which is not innate but must be worked at. In the *Second Part, XVIII*, Isaac is insistent that someone who is naturally humble will not experience the same sense of God's presence as some one who has needed to deliberately humble him/herself. The humility and powerlessness of the child is of no particular merit compared to that which is achieved by consciously subduing the will.[64] Natural humility and mildness is akin to being born a eunuch, for whom 'it is nature which has moderated their impulses, and not strength of will'.[65] The true state of penitence, which predisposes the soul to tears, must be consciously entered, through the disciplined exercise of free will, because repentance which follows 'the removal

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[59] *Homily 43*, trans Miller (1984) 213.
[60] *Homily 14*, trans Miller (1984) 83.
[61] *Second Part*, XVIII, 7, trans Brock (1995) 69.
[62] Isaac is inconsistent in his attitude to psalmody. In several earlier cited instances, he claims that reciting the full gamut of psalms may be sacrificed to other spiritual activities, such as weeping and lamenting for sins. In *Homily 54*, trans Miller (1984) 268, however, he writes, in connection with meditating on the psalms: 'let your mind gaze steadfastly upon the study of these things as though you were reading certain acts of Divine providence, even until your soul is roused to sublime understandings through awestruck wonder at the Divine oeconomy; and from this your soul will be moved either to glorification or to profitable mourning'.
[63] *Second Part*, XIV, 46, trans Brock (1995) 58.
[64] *Second Part*, XVIII, 7–9, trans Brock (1995) 67–9.
[65] *Second Part*, XVIII, 10, trans Brock (1995) 69, cf. *Homily 77*, trans Miller (1984) 383.

of our free will' cannot be a well-spring of joy, nor will it be reckoned for the reward of those who possess it'.[66]

Isaac refers obliquely to the acceptability of the penitent tax-collector over the self-righteous Pharisee as a scriptural example of conscious contrition.[67] For those who are by nature already meek, discernment is necessary in order for them to experience tears.[68] Fasting may assist in acquiring humility. Isaac sees fasting as a physical humbling of the body, in particular the stomach, and the adjacent loins, which are the seat of many passionate demands.[69] Fasting is a secret virtue, which confers individual benefit; the companion weapon of tears, however, being visible profits others by demonstrating God's grace to them.[70]

Whilst requiring the active cooperation of the penitent, humility cannot be acquired purely by human endeavour. It is a Holy Gift 'received amidst vigils consisting of supplications and fervent entreaties'.[71] The cooperation of human labours and holy grace[72] make the eyes 'become two fonts of baptism by the flow of his tears'.[73] Humility is not only a state of purity within the heart, but involves a certain physical demeanour, demonstrating 'chastity of the senses; a moderated voice; mean speech . . . easily flowing tears; a solitary soul'.[74] This interplay of inner and outer states of being marks Isaac's anthropology.

Isaac teaches that the involuntary nature of tears shed with true discernment is not understood by the uninitiated.[75] Discernment about the world's vanity and folly[76] is enhanced by the discipline of perpetual remembrance of death, which is 'a good fetter for the outward members'.[77] Both love and fear of God can give rise to the conditions which predispose the soul to humility. He who fears God learns

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[66] *Homily 2*, trans Miller (1984) 12.
[67] *Book of Grace*, 7, 84, trans Miller (1984) 424.
[68] *Second Part*, XVIII, 11, trans Brock (1995) 69.
[69] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 171–2.
[70] *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 33.
[71] *Second Part*, XXVII, 3, trans Brock (1995) 89.
[72] Isaac cites 'Mysteries are revealed to the humble', Eccl. 3.19, Proverbs 3.34, and emphasises that it is God's Holy Spirit which grants a state of humility, and not a man's having experienced 'a single compunctionate thought . . . or through the few tears that he sheds'. *Homily 77*, trans Miller (1984) 384.
[73] *Homily 20*, trans Miller (1984) 104.
[74] *Homily 71*, trans Miller (1984) 349.
[75] *Second Part*, XVIII, 17, trans Brock (1995) 70.
[76] *Homily 38*, trans Miller (1984) 166.
[77] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 311, cf. *Homily 51*, trans Miller (1984) 246, and cf. 'The ardent love of stillness is a constant expectation of death'. *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 316.

modest humility, whilst the man who loves God experiences a joyful humility and is possessed of 'great exhuberance and an open and insuppressible heart'.[78]

Silence, like humility, involves the whole person: it is born in the heart and then 'leads the body by force to persevere in stillness'.[79] Isaac is specific that such silence is not coterminous with the quietness of pure prayer: he distinguishes between the absence of thoughts and the presence of active prayer:

> When the mind is entirely without any kind of reflection, this is silence of the mind and not purity of prayer. It is one thing to pray purely, and quite another for the mind to be silent from any wandering at all or insight into the words of prayer, and to remain without any stirrings.[80]

The desirability of true silence is so great that it merits, according to Isaac, extreme encratic practices, such as binding the tongue with a stone or cord, or fasting to the state of exhaustion.[81] The reason for this is that it produces 'a multitude of tears . . . through a wonderful divine vision of something that the heart distinctly perceives, sometimes with pain, sometimes with amazement'.[82] As well as believing that silence may be apparent but not authentic, so with humility Isaac claims that the body can demonstrate this without it being rooted in the heart:

> If you are not holy in your heart, at least be holy in your body. If you do not mourn in your heart, at least cover your face with mourning. If you cannot bemerciful, at least speak as though you are a sinner . . . No man has understanding if he is not humble, and he who lacks humility is devoid of understanding. No man is humble if he is not peaceful, and he who is not peaceful is not humble. And no man is peaceful without rejoicing.[83]

Such bodily holiness should start with control of the tongue.[84] This is not necessarily hypocrisy; it is a matter of nurturing the seed that

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[78] *Homily 51*, trans Miller (1984) 244–5.
[79] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 310.
[80] *Second Part*, XV, 7, trans Brock (1995) 60–61.
[81] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 311.
[82] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 310.
[83] *Homily 51*, trans Miller (1984) 247.
[84] 'If you guard your tongue, my brother, God will give you the gift of compunction of heart so that you may see your soul, and thereby you will enter into spiritual joy. But if your tongue defeats you—believe me in what I say to you—you will never be able to escape from darkness. If you do not have a pure heart, at least have a pure mouth, as the blessed John said'. *Homily 48*, trans Miller (1984) 236.

has been planted. The continual practice of any spiritual labour—'toil and watchfulness, incessant yearning, constant tears and humility, and [by] assistance from Heaven'[85]—refines and strengthens it, so that the outer demeanour may lead to the inner state.

In addition to recounting his own experience, Isaac cites several authorities on the instrinsic benefit of these virtues. First, he mentions the tradition of the Fathers (including Basil the Great)[86] who 'pre-eminently chose silence and seclusion from all things' in order to 'be unremittingly in the proximity of God by means of their continual prayer'.[87] Holy Scripture is also a key point of reference, and Isaac is keen to stress the importance of avoiding any pride about being humble 'because of a single compunctionate thought which rises in him on some occasion, or through the few tears that he sheds'.[88] Yet another corroboration of the necessity for solitude is found by Isaac in the example set by Christ himself,[89] whose intimate converse with His Father was located in solitude and whose very incarnation is the prototype of humility, as he says in *Homily 77*:

> Humility is the raiment of the Godhead. The Word Who became man clothed Himself in it, and therewith He spoke to us in our body.[90]

This desire to converse with God through solitary prayer[91] is another means by which we can be incorporated into Christ, in addition to

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[85] *Homily 58*, trans Miller (1984) 287.

[86] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 173.

[87] 'our Fathers received this lofty teaching concerning prayer as it were from our Saviour Himself and they received vigilance through prayer as being a commandment of the Apostle. They pre-eminently chose silence and seclusion from all things, so that they could be unremittingly in the proximity of God by means of their continual prayer . . . In short, in every respect they were very assiduous so as to be able to speak with God without a veil, in so far as possible, their mind being unencumbered by anything whatsoever'. *Homily 75*, trans Miller (1984) 371; cf. *Homily 69*, trans Miller (1984) 338, which cites the advice of 'our Holy Father', and also *Second Part* XVIII, 19, trans Brock (1995) 71.

[88] Eccl. 3.19, cf. Proverbs 3.34, cited in *Homily 77*, trans Miller (1984) 384.

[89] 'For our Saviour too, during the night times, chose deserted places; besides He honoured and loved stillness at all times, saying, 'Let us go to the wilderness to rest by ourselves'; and 'He sat down in a boat and went to a deserted region with his disciples,' . . . This (converse) which the heavenly ranks alone possess, was also made known to human beings in the Son of God who came down to their abode and indicated to them concerning the ministry of invisible beings, whose task is that they should be stirred by praises of God in that great stillness which is spread over their world'. *Second Part*, XII, 1, trans Brock (1995) 43.

[90] *Homily 77*, trans Miller (1984) 381.

[91] *Homily 63*, trans Miller (1984) 303 and 304. See also *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 307: 'Inward sorrow is a bridle for the senses. If you love the truth, love

sharing in His sufferings. Those who wish to share in the life of Christ must seek solitude in order to converse with Him, just as Christ Himself sought solitude to converse with His Father.[92]

As with so many aspects of the spiritual life, the precursors of an ideal state and the condition itself are mutually sustaining: mourning can lead to humility, and is itself the daughter of virtue. However, 'if humility is lacking, the former two are in vain.[93] Isaac advises to never cease mourning until recognizing that God has granted the gift of humility.[94] Silence and humility are powerful stimuli to mourning. They are also crucial in prompting repentance, which for Isaac can only be obtained by 'the man who is sorely afflicted in his heart', a state of contrition which is reserved for those who 'possess unremitting silence'.[95] For Isaac, repentance has paramount importance in the spiritual journey. In his homilies, there is no single exposition of its place in the noetic life; rather, Isaac portrays its role as varied and widespread. Repentance as well as being a necessary quality in itself is, for Isaac, also a stage in the progression towards spiritual enlightenment and perfection. It is inextricably linked to the practice of penitent grief, and a subject to which Isaac devotes much space.

Repentance is one of three crucial spiritual states, the others being purity and perfection.[96] It is both a step up which brings a man 'nigh the experience of the divine vision that results from his righteous works,'[97] and a 'summit' which shows 'the level of the soul in its fullness'.[98] Isaac believes repentance to be the very purpose of earthly life;[99] it is the mother of the life to come, its own mother being stillness.[100] Although not as explicit as Ephrem in developing the notion of the fecundity of repentance, Isaac does use the image of maternity and infancy to describe repentance: the infant weeps at being

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silence. This will make you illumined in God like the sun and will deliver you from the illustions of ignorance. Silence unites you to God Himself'.

[92] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 316, and see also 317: 'The man who follows Christ in solitary mourning is greater than he who praises Christ amid the congregations of men'.

[93] *Homily 57*, trans Miller (1984) 282.

[94] *Homily 57*, trans Miller (1984) 283–4.

[95] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 306, 307; cf. 'Repentance joined with conversations is a shattered vessel'. *Homily 51*, trans Miller (1984) 244.

[96] *Homily 71*, trans Miller (1984) 345.

[97] *Homily 49*, trans Miller (1984) 239.

[98] *Second Part*, XX, 18, trans Brock (1995) 78.

[99] 'This life has been given to you for repentance; do not waste it in vain pursuits'. *Homily 74*, trans Miller (1984) 364.

[100] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 316.

separated from its mother, the birth pangs are painful but necessary to produce the offspring.[101] The man who separates himself from the world 'receives from repentance the seed of life, and being like an infant, a keen sorrow is stirred in him'.[102] Isaac offers various definitions of repentance, and obliquely or overtly, they are related to a sense of grief at being deprived of perfection. This grief can be characterised as a type of mourning; repentance is 'perpetual sorrow of heart while meditating on that great and inexpressible state, saying, 'How can I reach that ineffable entrance?'[103]

The purpose of this sorrow is to obtain forgiveness of past sins, and protection from future misdoings:

> The meaning of the word *repentance*, as we have learned from the true means of its performance, is this: continual and intense supplication which by means of prayer filled with compunction draws nigh to God in order to seek forgiveness of past offences, and entreaty for preservation from future ones.[104]

Spiritual mourning is grief for things of the past, which have to be laid aside, as being representative of a pre-saved condition.[105] However, the need for repentance transcends particular times and states, because the need for forgiveness is perpetual, and therefore so also should be awareness of that need.[106] Even one hour of genuine regretful consciousness of one's sins is of more significance than 'he who raises the dead by his prayer while dwelling amid many men'.[107] Repentance is the 'medicine suitable for everyone', which can be used liberally, to achieve daily freedom from the stain of sin.[108] The 'comfort which comes from sorrowing and the gift of tears'[109] is similar to that from a soothing ointment: it is 'the balm for the one whose sores have turned foul and become putrid' and the abrasive tool to 'scour away the mud of his actions by means of the tears of his eyes'.[110]

Isaac sees in repentance an awakening which is true discernment.

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[101] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 305.
[102] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 305.
[103] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 316.
[104] *Homily 70*, trans Miller (1984) 340.
[105] *Homily 71*, trans Miller (1984) 345.
[106] *Homily 70*, trans Miller (1984) 340.
[107] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 316.
[108] *Second Part*, XL, 8, trans Brock (1995) 127.
[109] *Second Part*, V, 3, trans Brock (1995) 5.
[110] *Second Part*, XX, 24, 24, trans Brock (1995) 79.

It is an adult state, compared to the ignorance of the child, a distinction he makes in connection with the idea of repentant grief as a second baptism. Both the knowledge and love which may be obtained before the experience of repentance are illusory and not to be trusted. This newly acquired awareness must endure if perfection is to be achieved,[111] and the penitent must take care not to become complacent through having seen the hope of salvation offered by repentance, nor lose some sense of fear of God. Isaac cites King David as the example of one who continued to repent, even after becoming aware of God's mercy.[112] Fear works in conjunction with repentance to move the penitent towards love of God:

> As it is not possible to cross over the great ocean without a ship, so no one can attain to love without fear. This foetid sea, which lies between us and the noetic paradise, we may cross by the ship of repentance, whose oarsmen are those of fear. But if fear's oarsmen do not pilot the barque of repentance whereby we cross over the sea of this world to God, we shall be drowned in the foetid abyss. Repentance is the ship and fear is the pilot; love is the divine haven. Thus fear sets us in the ship of repentance, transports us over the foul sea of this life (that is, of the world), and guides us to the divine port, which is love.[113]

As already mentioned, fear and love of God are understood as co-dependent. God's loving mercy is demonstrated to those who fear Him, by the gift of repentance, a gracious second baptism. This concept is shared with Klimakos and strongly developed by Symeon the New Theologian, in his image of the betrothal/marriage parallel. The conscious grief for sin, expressed by weeping, is the corroboration of the charism of baptism conferred upon the infant. It is the adult response to the prior experience of having been marked as God's chosen child:

> Repentance is given to man as grace after grace, for repentance is a second regeneration by God. That of which we have received an earnest by baptism, we receive as a gift by means of repentance. Repentance is the door of mercy, opened to those who seek it. By way of this door we enter into the mercy of God, and apart from this entrance we shall not find mercy. 'For all have sinned,' according to divine Scripture,' being justified freely by His grace.' (Rom. 3.23, 24). Repentance is the

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[111] *Homily 32*, trans Miller (1984) 153.
[112] *Homily 10*, trans Miller (1984) 75.
[113] *Homily 46*, trans Miller (1984) 224, cf. *Second Part*, V, 14, trans Brock (1995) 8.

> second grace and is begotten in the heart by faith and fear. Fear is the paternal rod which guides our way until we reach the spiritual paradise of good things.[114]

The importance of this teaching to Isaac is proven by his referring to these words in a subsequent homily. The gift conferred by repentance is spiritual knowledge, food too strong for the spiritual infant of the catechumen.[115] The concept of repentance as a second chance is further developed in the *Second Part*, where Isaac explains that that it is given graciously by God as a corrective to human misuse of free will. It is to be a daily boon which involves 'the mind, the will, and the conscience, as well as a heart which suffers and feels compunction'.[116]

Repentance is expounded by Isaac as of great significance in catalysing the spiritual life. It is an awareness of the mind and conscience, but also felt by the heart, and expressed by the body through weeping. Clearly such a state should be the aim of all Christian people. Isaac, writing as a monk to other monks, rightly sees repentance as being epitomised by the life of the solitary. To express repentance through mourning for sin is the defining characteristic of the monk, and his *raison d'etre*.

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[114] *Homily 46*, trans Miller (1984) 223.
[115] *Homily 47*, trans Miller (1984) 227.
[116] *Second Part*, X, 19, trans Brock (1995) 29.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HIERARCHIES OF THE SPIRITUAL STATE

Having examined Isaac's understanding of human anthropology and the nature of spiritual grief, it is now possible to examine the closely related issue of what might be called spiritual hierarchies. It has already been observed that Isaac uses a hierarchical structure to explain the route to spiritual perfection, and that he sees within the human person a hierarchy of corporeal, psychic and pneumatic components. Pure prayer belongs to the highest of these stages. Tears are found at certain stages of the spiritual journey undertaken by this tripartite human person, and are seen by Isaac as indicative of having achieved a certain level of closeness to God. The tears that are shed at various stages on this journey have their own order of precedence. This emphasis in Isaac on categorising and ranking aspects of the humans and their spiritual progress suggests the influence of John of Apamea (John the Solitary).

Little is known about John of Apamea. Until earlier this century, his works were attributed to the fourth century John of Lycopolis, but currently he is believed to have lived during the second half of the fifth century.[1] Strothmann gives evidence that John of Apamea wrote in Syriac, not Greek.[2] Hausherr attributes John's dominant doctrine of hope in the life to come to Ephrem the Syrian.[3] He sees Isaac's tripartite description of the spiritual life as owing much to the influence of John of Apamea.[4] In order to evaluate this claim, it is necessary to look briefly at John's spiritual anthropology.

Harb follows Hausherr's lead in noting that John is following in an established tradition in dividing spiritual progress into three stages, a tradition in which St. Paul, Dionysius, Origen, Evagrios and Clement of Alexandria all participate, although they each name these stages

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[1] Bradley (1972–3) 764ff., and Harb (1971) 226–8.
[2] Strothmann (1972) 45–53.
[3] (1948) 34–35.
[4] Trans Hausherr (1939) 15.

differently.[5] Hausherr sees John's contribution as being that he emphasises the need for spiritual life to be based on 'practising the appropriate virtues of body and soul.' Hausherr interprets this as meaning that, for Isaac, 'body and soul are not the enemies of the spiritual life, they are the instruments of and inferior stages of perfection'.[6] This emphasis on praxis is certainly evident in John's writing. Harb identifies as distinctive in John of Apamea the conception of not just the spiritual progress, but the nature of the human person itself, as a tripartite unity.[7] This may have Biblical roots, and indeed John himself follows Origen in developing a concept of anthropological *taxis* from 1 Cor. 3. 3, from which he deduces that man can operate at three different levels, according to the body, the soul, or the spirit.[8] At times he suggests that these orders belong to three different types of people, at other places he describes the phenomenon as if any one person may have within them the potential to achieve each of these three conditions. This is echoed in Isaac's writings, where the prevelant divisions into three can apply both to his anthropology and pnematology, with consequent scope for confusion.

The key text for exploring the issue of spiritual hierarchies is *Homily 52*[9] which describes the movement from passionate life to dispassionate as constituting three stages of knowledge: this analysis is summarised elsewhere in his writings.[10] These stages are closely related, but not identical, to what he calls the 'three intelligible degrees in which knowledge ascends and descends . . . body, soul and spirit'. These, for Isaac, are 'the three degrees of knowledge wherein is brought together a man's whole course in the body, in the soul, and in the spirit'. He notes further that 'The Fathers call these stages: natural, supranatural, and contranatural'.[11] Each stage is accompanied by specific emotions, which progress from 'continual pricking of conscience' and 'remembrance of death' to culminate in 'sorrow, sadness, fear of God, shame proper to all nature, grieving over former sins . . . supplication of God with mourning'.[12]

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[5] (1971) 229, cf. trans Hausherr (1939) 8, trans Hansbury (1989) 13ff.
[6] Trans (1939) 8.
[7] (1971) 229.
[8] Trans Hausherr (1939), part 1, 37.
[9] Trans Miller (1984) 253–263.
[10] *Homily 53*, trans Miller (1984) 264–5, and *Homily 12*, trans Miller (1984) 79–80.
[11] *Homily 52*, trans Miller (1984) 258, 261.
[12] *Homily 47*, trans Miller (1984) 227.

At the first stage, that of the body, human beings are ruled by their passions; the second level is the place of fasting, vigil, persistent prayer, but is still tainted by the bodily demands of the preliminary stage. The level of perfection liberates 'knowledge' such that it can 'soar on wings in the realms of the bodiless and touch the depths of the unfathomable sea'. The personification continues, with knowledge thus 'musing upon the wondrous and divine workings of God's governance of noetic and corporeal creatures'.[13]

Progression from the lower state to the higher is not automatic; someone who starts out in the wrong way will move downwards.[14] The spiritual labours appropriate to each stage build on the previous level. The use of discernment permits the same things to be done, but for the proper reason; for example, physical posture and activities (reading, the 'labour of kneeling' and psalmody) remains an issue even at the highest stage, but 'persistent meditation on God's providence' is more important, and so 'a small amount of Scripture and of the Office psalms is sufficient'.[15]

Isaac continually refers to order and precedence in the area of spiritual development. Divine love is higher than prayer;[16] intuitive rapturous prayer is higher than automatic recitation of psalms. For Isaac, human life is seen continually in relation to the superior life of Heaven; humanity is inferior to God. Tears, too, may be of an inferior or superior nature. Their mere presence is insufficient evidence of spiritual enlightenment, because, as with many other aspects of spiritual experience, Isaac sees penitent tears as having their own order and scale of precedence. Also, Isaac distinguishes tears not only according to where in the hierarchy they occur, but also according to the actual qualities and nature of the tears shed.

The first tears to be shed, by the comparatively immature penitent, are burning and scorch the body. These are tears which flow 'out of contrition and anguish of heart on account of sins'.[17] The beginner experiences tears:

> At first only to a small degree: that is, repeatedly during the course of a single day tears come over a man, and then leave him again. But

[13] *Homily 52*, trans Miller (1984) 261.
[14] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 312.
[15] *Second Part*, XXII, 1–6, trans Brock (1995) 84.
[16] *Book of Grace*, 4, 9, trans Miller (1984) 408.
[17] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 174.

> from this comes weeping without cease, and from her unceasing tears the soul receives peace in her thoughts. And from peace of thoughts she is raised to limpid purity.[18]

It is essential to pass through this stage before entering into the second order, which is:

> superior to the first; this is the realm where a man receives mercy. These are the tears that are shed because of insight; they make the body comely and anoint as if with oil, and they pour forth by themselves without compulsion . . . the body received from them a sort of nourishment, and gladness is imprinted upon the face.[19]

The inference is that the first, lower order of tears must be striven for, although at all stages penitential tears are a gift from God.[20] Tears in the early stages of spiritual enlightenment are painful or bitter. The tears which flow at a later stage are sweet and involuntary, and are likely to be more copious, and eventually become continuous.[21] They are accompanied by a sensation of gentle warmth[22] in place of the searing nature of the lower order of tears. They are joyful because of the 'insight' they contain, arising from direct, empirical experience of God, which is characterised by hope, as Isaac records in *Second Part, VII, 17*:

> Continual weeping which is born out of reflection on (spiritual) knowledge is the indication of a soul which has become aware of the object of its hope—not as a result of reading or from hearsay, but by itself it has become aware of the hope (which is the basis) of its ministry. For once the door of insights had been opened before the heart, it is no longer possible for the pupil of the eye to be held back from weeping, owing to the feeling of pleasure which the soul receives.[23]

For Isaac, spiritual progress is indicated by the ubiquitous presence of the right sort of tears, and an increasingly effortless weeping:

> If with each thought moving in your soul, every memory, and the divine visions occuring in your stillness, you observe that your eyes are filled with tears which rain down your cheeks without effort, then know that a breach in the opposing camp has begun to appear before you.[24]

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[18] *Homily 18*, trans Miller (1984) 96.
[19] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 175.
[20] *Homily 36*, trans Miller (1984) 160.
[21] *Homily 68*, trans Miller (1984) 331.
[22] *Book of Grace*, 4, 21, trans Miller (1984) 408.
[23] *Second Part*, VII, 17, trans Brock (1995) 20, cf. *Additional Homily 3*, trans Miller (1984) 391.
[24] *Homily 67*, trans Miller (1984) 329.

The shedding of tears is the most significant example of the inclusion of bodily states at an advanced spiritual level. Indeed, Isaac asserts that tears are the proof of spiritual advancement taking place. The presence of physical tears marks the boundary between the corporeal and spiritual life:

> tears are established for the mind as a kind of boundary between what is bodily and what is spiritual and between pasisonateness and purity. Until a man receives this gift, the activity of his work is still in the outer man and he has not yet perceived the activity of the hidden things of the spiritual man . . . This, therefore, is the exact sign that the mind has left this world and perceived the spiritual world.[25]

Such tears are the sign of moving on to a superior level of consciousness, and are akin to birthpangs because they demonstrate new life. What was inward has been articulated outwardly: this resonates with the language of hiddenness/revelation already explored in Ephrem's writings. In a remarkable phrase, Isaac suggests that the monk arrives in the divine presence through his tears, which weigh more than any encratic practice:

> Though you should suspend yourselves by your eyelids [before God], do not think you have attained to anything by the manner of life which you lead until you have attained to tears. For until then, your hidden self is in the service of the world; that is, you are leading the life of those who dwell in the world, and do the work of God with the outward man. But the inward man is still without fruit, for his fruit begins with tears . . . when you attain to the region of tears, then you know that your mind has left the prison of this world and has set its foot on the roadway of the new age.[26]

The soul at this stage begins to grow in awareness, as a young animal opens its eyes some time after birth. For Isaac, the eyes' openness denotes the consciousness of the perfected one; having entered into the divine realm, the eyes are opened to 'the divine vision of things such as they are', and copious tears will 'wash your cheeks by their abundance'.[27]

So tears are shed as the human soul moves towards *theoria*. They are prompted by the love and fear of God.[28] In the case of the truly enlightened, they are copious and ceaseless. Tears are absent in those

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[25] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 174.
[26] *Homily 14*, trans Miller (1984) 82–3.
[27] *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 34.
[28] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 183.

whose concerns are still enmeshed with the world.[29] The condition of continual weeping ceases when the soul enters the ultimate state of vision of God, because 'when the mind is exalted above created things, the body also takes leave of tears'.[30] This is a sign that truth has been perceived, and it brings about 'the silence of the activity of the members'. Here, Isaac describes an apophatic level of prayer, which goes beyond prayer to an ever deeper inner state. The external manifestations of prayer—the words uttered, the physical gestures which necessarily accompany it—are inferior to what is spiritual. The proper boundary for 'sighs, prostrations, heart-felt supplications, sweet cries of lamentation'[31] is transcended by the person who is not merely progressing, but has achieved the state of perfection. This is why tears, although described as perpetual, may ultimately cease, in the few cases of true purity of heart. Such perfection may only be attained by those whose response to God bears witness to the awesome love which characterises the Creator. Just as God's love for humanity is both loving and rigorous, so those who achieve perfection will feel both love and fear for God. They will be able to share both in the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, by participating in Christ's sufferings, and those of fallen humanity.

[29] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 174.
[30] *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 34.
[31] *Homily 23*, trans Miller (1984) 116, 118.

CHAPTER NINE

HUMANITY'S FILIATION WITH GOD

In Isaac's hierarchical understanding of the created order, great emphasis is placed on a correct relationship between Creator and created. The impetus to repent, and to grieve for sin, is shaped by that understanding, and is based, as suggested by Biblical tradition, on a respect for God which may be described as fear, or awe. In Isaac's interpretation of the human psyche, fear is closely linked to love of God. It is through an appropriate response to God's love that humanity can seek to become incorporated into the life of Christ, and Isaac describes this as axiomatic of the life of the mourner.

Isaac sees the primary step in the mystical meeting with God as being a sense of fear, which Khalife-Hachem describes as being 'the chief virtue of the corporeal stage'.[1] This understanding of God constitutes Isaac's initial statement, at the beginning of his first homily: 'The fear of God is the beginning of virtue, and it is said to be the offspring of faith'.[2] Elsewhere he lists virtue, fervent faith and 'the Lord's chastisement', as comprising the three ways 'by which every rational soul can draw nigh to God'.[3] Through awe of God, mankind makes progress, provided other worldly distractions are removed.[4] *Homily Three* is clear that the praxis of the virtues leads to spiritual knowledge, but acknowledges that 'both are preceded by fear and love; and again, fear precedes love'.[5] Fear should not obscure God's love: his wrath at humanity's misdoings arises from his loving kindness, which caused him to create all things.[6] Love of God can be like sweetness 'poured out continually in our hearts like honey or a

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[1] (1970/1) 2044.

[2] *Homily 1*, 1, trans Miller (1984) 3.

[3] *Homily 6*, trans Miller (1984) 53.

[4] *Homily 1*, 10, trans Miller (1984) 4. According to *Second Part*, XIV, 47 trans Brock (1995) 58, separation from the world enables humanity to be 'mingled in His love'.

[5] *Homily 3*, trans Miller (1984) 22.

[6] *Second Part*, XXXVIII, 2, trans Brock (1995) 113 provides a eulogy to the love God demonstrated in creating the world and providing for its transformation.

honeycomb'.[7] Out of mercy God wants the sinner to repent and be restored, and in God, as in humans, mercy derives from a piteous love, being 'a sorrow and pity stirred up by goodness, and it compassionately inclines a man in the direction of all'.[8]

Where God's love is reciprocated by his creature, a transformation is effected, proportionate to the love experienced.[9] Humanity is most human when it seems to be acting as the image of God; to show mercy to others is therefore pleasing to God: this is shown plainly in *Homily 1*, where Isaac advises those who wish to 'commune with God in your intellect by receiving a perception of that delight which is not enslaved to the senses' to 'Pursue mercy; for when something that is like unto God is found in you, then that holy beauty is depicted by Him'. Acting mercifully 'immediately brings the soul into communion with the unity of the glory of the Godhead's splendour'.[10] Isaac's emphasis on God's mercy is closely connected to the mutual love of God and mankind, and as already noted, it is one aspect of his thought, according to Hansbury, which caused him to be viewed with suspicion.

Fear of God is not only fear of chastisement, which may be averted by tears.[11] It is also fear of losing his love. Isaac describes as hell the consciousness of having sinned against love; the 'scourge of love' is more tormenting than any punishment imposed by the wronged party.[12] Both love and fear of God may produce the necessary precondition for salvation, and this different sources take account of the variety of human dispositions, and manifest themselves in different forms:

> One man is humbled because of his fear of God; another is humbled because of his joy. The man humbled from fear of God is possessed of modesty in his members, a right ordering of his senses, and a heart contrite at all times. But the man humbled because of Joy is possessed of great exuberance and an open and insuppressible heart.[13]

Isaac portrays the relationship between humanity and God as that of a child and a loving but firm father. The child feels both love

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[7] *Second Part*, XXIX, 5, trans Brock (1995) 91.
[8] *Homily 51*, trans Miller (1984) 244.
[9] *Homily 35*, trans Miller (1984) 158.
[10] *Homily 1*, 34, trans Miller (1984) 7, cf. *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 313: 'Let a merciful heart preside over your whole discipline, and you will be at peace with God'.
[11] *Homily 16*, trans Miller (1984) 91.
[12] *Homily 28*, trans Miller (1984) 141. Isaac says here that love can be a scourge.
[13] *Homily 51*, trans Miller (1984) 244–5.

for God, and fear at displeasing him. This fear prevents complacency, because being confident 'is as though a man has taken deadly poison. For even with true and genuine sons ten parts of love would be mixed with five parts of fear'.[14] The perfect man needs to find the correct balance between the hope borne of repentance and awe at God's might.[15] Imitating God's mercy assists in finding and maintaining this equilibrium, since it is 'a sorrow and pity stirred up by goodness, and it compassionately inclines a man in the direction of all'.[16] Awareness of God's mercy, and repentance for having grieved and distanced God through sin, leads to tears during prayer. They are a sign that the soul's repentance has been accepted, and that the soul has progressed towards 'the plain of limpid purity'.[17]

Isaac's emphasis on love and mercy, rooted in fear of the Living God, is an explicit expression of obedience to the two great commandments. The person who loves God should also love his neighbour. This charity is demonstrated by the voluntary sharing in the sufferings of fellow humanity, both out of compassion for mankind and in imitation of, and filiation with, Christ. Fear of God the Father is tempered by a loving response to other people, demonstrated by sharing in suffering and encouraging an awareness of each other's faults in order to be cleansed from them by tears. To share this aspect of fellow human's journey also, Isaac explains, constitutes the necessary incorporation into the death and resurrection of Christ Himself. He writes much about suffering, sharing the thoroughly Pauline interpretation of suffering enabling us to conform to Christ. Rather than focusing, as does the Old Testament, on suffering being punishment for sin, he interprets it as being a refining process, since 'there is no virtue without having yoked to it continual struggle'.[18] Suffering may lead to joyful insights in this world, especially by deepening the sincerity of prayer.[19] Suffering is inflicted on unruly children by a loving Father, who knows that too many sweet things are bad for the child. As he writes in *Homily 30*, 'The man who kills his son by feeding him honey does not differ from the man who kills his son with a dagger'.[20]

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[14] *Homily 27*, trans Miller (1984) 135.
[15] *Homily 10*, trans Miller (1984) 74.
[16] *Homily 51*, trans Miller (1984) 244.
[17] *Homily 6*, trans Miller (1984) 53.
[18] *Second Part*, X, 13, trans Brock (1995) 27.
[19] *Second Part*, X, 41, trans Brock (1995) 57, cf. *Second Part* XIV, 43, trans Brock (1995) 57.
[20] Trans Miller (1984) 145, cf. *Second Part*, XXVIII, trans Brock (1995) 90: 'I am

Similarly, discipline is enforced out of fatherly love;[21] indeed he advocates the time-honoured approach of 'secretly withdrawing his love' in order to condition his children.[22] To read the suffering that may occur as a result of parental discipline as reprisal is to misunderstand the purpose, Isaac tells us, since it aims to 'instil in us love and awe'; God's 'gentle compassion and His immeasurable munificence . . . makes many threats, but He makes the punishment small out of grace, all in order to increase love for Him in ourselves'.[23] So undergoing suffering is a divine gift[24] which demonstrates God's providential care for humanity: in allowing his 'saints' to be tested, God shows himself as 'their redeemer'.[25] Suffering is also a human phenomenon which must be endured on earth in order to receive the reward of the life to come.[26]

Isaac realises that human weakness prompts the hope that suffering will be transitory, and that great joy will follow a period of despondency, just as the sun shines brightly when a cloud has passed by.[27] Suffering necessarily precedes joy, just as the sourness of unripe fruit precedes its sweetness.[28] Isaac's encratic tendencies give ample scope for him to praise the discomforts of earthly life, and the need to struggle with physical and emotional adversity in order to be reformed in the likeness of the Creator.[29] He also advocates voluntary acceptance of guilt and tribulation as aids to humility.[30]

Particularly relevant in this context, Isaac sees especial significance in suffering which takes the form of mourning or weeping. He is adamant that such mourning and lamenting should not be despondency[31] or despair.[32] There is no room for despair, because no-one is beyond

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not so completely foolish as to feed you just on honey, without any variety, with you (left) entirely unaware that you are clothed in temperaments which are easily subjected to illnesses'.

[21] Isaac talks of 'trials that are afflicted by the paternal rod for the soul's progress and growth'. *Homily 42*, trans Miller (1984) 209–10.

[22] *Second Part*, XIX, 9, trans Brock (1995) 73.

[23] *Homily 36*, trans Miller (1984) 161.

[24] *Homily 59*, trans Miller (1984) 289–90, cf. *Homily 42*, trans Miller (1984) 211.

[25] *Homily 61*, trans Miller (1984) 295.

[26] *Second Part*, XXXIV, 1, trans Brock (1995) 103.

[27] *Homily 46*, trans Miller (1984) 233; cf. *Homily 4*, trans Miller (1984) 29.

[28] *Homily 48*, trans Miller (1984) 232.

[29] *Second Part*, XL, 17, trans Brock (1995) 129.

[30] *Homily 6*, trans Miller (1984) 55, cf. *Homily 57*, trans Miller (1984) 283.

[31] *Homily 13*, trans Miller (1984) 81 and *Second Part*, VI, 9, trans Brock (1995) 15.

[32] *Homily 25*, trans Miller (1984) 127.

help, if they repent.[33] He cites Simon Peter as the example of penitent grief who was honoured because of 'a brief moment of mourning', which showed that his fault was not incurable.[34]

Isaac sees mourning, or the 'sorrow which is according to God'[35] as enacting the two great commandments. It demonstrates love for God through willingness to be chastised by him, and by participation in the sufferings of Christ, especially when that sharing in Christ's grief is a solitary journey, as befits the *ihiyadutha*.[36] In following the way of the cross, God's saints step in the footsteps of Christ, who 'perfected this path after enduring all such things Himself'.[37] Mourning demonstrates love of one's neighbours, by grieving for the sins which separate them from the love of God. Isaac is explicit that since man is comprised of body and soul, this love of Creator and neighbour must have physical as well as noetic expression:

> The second commandment is the love of man in accord with the duality of human nature; consequently its observance is twofold. I mean that we invisibly fulfill it in our consciousness and at the same time we fulfill it with the body . . . For as man was constituted from two parts, soul and body, so all things pertaining to him are accomplished in a twofold manner, corresponding to the duality of his state.[38]

In other words, to weep with those that weep is to fulfil the second great commandment, and fulfilling that opens the gate of salvation. Furthermore, it is the full integrity of the human person that is thus redeemed. The 'duality of his state' is a mirror of the dual nature of Christ, and achieving integrity between these parts may be compared to becoming incorporated in Christ.

Isaac affirms both the necessity of shedding the physical tears which flow from the God-given body, and the importance of retaining detachment from inappropriate union with others. You should 'Rejoice with the joyous and weep with those who weep; for this is the sign of limpid purity' but should retain mental isolation, partaking in 'the

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[33] *Second Part*, V, 8, trans Brock (1995) 6.
[34] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 314.
[35] 2 Cor. 7.10.
[36] *Homily 64*, trans Miller (1984) 317.
[37] *Homily 60*, trans Miller (1984) 293–4.
[38] *Homily 76*, trans Miller (1984) 378, cf. *Homily 2*, trans Miller (1984) 13: 'The activity of taking up the cross is twofold, in conformity with the duality of our nature, which is divided into two parts'.

sufferings of all men, but keep[ing] your body distant from them'.[39] Isaac outlines a taxonomy of mourning. It should commence with supplication on behalf of sinners and the tempted, then move to weeping for those who repent, and finally, through others' prayers, 'ask compassion, mercy, and forgiveness for himself'.[40] Here there is an exchange of petition with other penitents, a mutuality which is opened up by the process of sharing in the sufferings of others. This participation in the corporate sinfulness of humanity is in direct imitation of Christ who 'was not wroth with sinners, but interceded for them'.[41] The correct response to sinners is not to hate them, but weep over them.

So Isaac sees redemption in love of one's neighbour, because it is 'the sign of complete likeness to God'.[42] The mercy one human shows to another reflects the love of God, which is poured into each human being by virtue of conformity with his likeness.[43] It also enacts the message of Matthew 25 that to do something for another is to do it to Christ, who shares humanity's flesh.[44] The willing acceptance of the loving disciplines of the Father and the proper fear which accompanies it enables the child of God to express love both to God and to fellow creatures. Within the framework of monastic life, the obedience and respect owed to the spiritual father mirrors the awe with which man regards God. The relationship between Isaac, as spiritual elder, and his reader, as spiritual child, is thus an image of that between God and humankind.

Within this model of redemption, mourning for sin was an essential component, articulating as it does the unity of the human person, and the unity of that person with God. In Isaac's eyes, his very identity as a monk is shaped by not just repentance, but mourning, and

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[39] *Homily 51*, trans Miller (1984) 247, and see also *Homily 2*, trans Miller (1984) 12: 'Support with a word the infirm and those who are grieved at heart in so far as this lies within your hands, then the Right Hand that sustains all will also sustain you. Through the toil of prayer and the anguish of your heart commune with those who are grieved at heart, and the Source of mercy will be opened up to your petitions'.

[40] *Book of Grace*, 7, 94, trans Miller (1984) 425, and cf. *Second Part*, V, 31, trans Brock (1995) 13: 'We should pray with suffering, and should make supplication to God for all these things with pain. And this is the attitude we should have towards all human beings: we should pray for them with suffering, as for ourselves'.

[41] *Homily 51*, trans Miller (1984) 250, cf. *Homily 5*, trans Miller (1984) 51: 'Love sinners, but hate their works'.

[42] *Homily 71*, trans Miller (1984) 346.

[43] *Homily 71*, trans Miller (1984) 344–5.

[44] Isaac asserts that in showing mercy to others, it is being shown to Christ himself. *Homily 76*, trans Miller (1984) 377.

this relates to the earlier mention of the use in the Syrian tradition of the word *abila* to describe the monk. Both Ephrem and Isaac record that the inner state of mourning was expressed by the outer demeanour. Isaac is described as sharing with his pupils 'a sad and furrowed countenance'; in weeping ceaselessly day and night, they 'bear witness to his dying utterly to the world and his nearness to God'.[45]

Isaac's anthropology of the spiritual life is shown by the integration of his bodily and mental condition. What is appropriate for all people—the integration of body, soul and spirit in worship of God—is imperative for the man who has cast aside the world to become a monk. Discernment empowers the monk to appear the same as ordinary men, but to live and act wholly oriented towards God. This is not something all can achieve. Mourning is a transition beyond the life of the passions, into a state of passionlessness, and is 'unknown to most men'.[46] The truly penitent is twice blessed, being both pure of heart and one who mourns. His/her reward is likewise two fold; he/she will see God, and be comforted according to God's will. Only those who have attained to this blessed state are able to understand the manner of this comfort.[47] The monk who truly mourns for sin is defined by the choice he has made to seek God before Mammon. He becomes an outsider, or stranger to the world:

> A mourner is he who passes all the days of his life in hunger and thirst for the sake of his hope in future good things. A monk is he who remains outside the world and is ever supplicating God to received future blessings. A monk's wealth is the comfort that comes of mourning and the joy that comes of faith, which shines in the secret places of his mind.[48]

Such mourning is distinct from the commonplace experience of ungodly or non-spiritual grief, which is a delusion resulting from the passions of the world.[49] The grief of contrition is sharp. In communion with the saints, it is the response of the contrite to a specific death, that of the soul, which has been 'slain by sins . . . your soul which

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[45] *Homily 11*, trans Miller (1984) 78.
[46] *Homily 25*, trans Miller (1984) 125.
[47] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 178.
[48] *Homily 6*, trans Miller (1984) 54.
[49] 'Grief is a manifestation that abounds with passions and worldly knowledge. A monk who is afflicted with grief in his old age bears witness to the fact that he did not labour in the beginning of his monastic life, and that the passions have bound him with the cords of grief and surrendered him to the scourges of remorse and sorrow'. *Book of Grace*, 2, 90, trans Miller (1984) 405.

is of greater value to you than all the world'.[50] But if this death is followed by the death of self, in conformity with Christ, both body and soul will be accorded the new life of the Kingdom. The mourning is the outward expression of the monk's inner state, which includes the joy which shines inwardly. Mourning thus integrates inner and outer, and the apparent contradiction of grief and joy. It is a unifying activity. This is the mourning written of in the beatitudes: the monk as mourner not only laments the loss of God's favour through sin, his contrition moves him on to long for the reward of the pure in heart, which is the vision of God. Mourning is as much about restoration to the body of those who seek righteousness, as it is grief at being deprived of kinship with God. This is a subtle and holy joy, not to be confused with the gaity of the undiscerning: it is sober inebriation with God,[51] not the intoxication of wine. Such mourning, and the joy which attends it, is focused on future hope rather than despair for past errors. It is the outward epiphany of the secret places deep within the human psyche.

The phenomenon of holy mourning not only distinguishes the monk from the penitent who is still in thrall to the world, it constitutes his sole labour, and gives him the specific title of 'mourner':

> What meditation can a monk have in his cell save weeping? Could he have any time free from weeping so as to turn his gaze to another thought? And what occupation is better than this? A monk's very cell and his solitude, which have a likeness to life in a tomb, far from heaven's joys, teach him that his work is to mourn. And the very calling of his name urges and spurs him on to this, because he is called 'the mournful one'(abila), that is, bitter in heart.[52]

Isaac, as a solitary, is predisposed to dispensing with outer forms and communal practices where true humility and contrition take their place. That he is not over-concerned with rigid adherence to the office of the psalms has been mentioned, though the importance of the psalms in his spiritual diet is self-evident. His understanding of the primacy of a pure heart over external behaviour is manifested by his recording that particular reverence was accorded to a father whose sole petition for forty years was: 'As a man I have sinned, but Thou, as God, forgive me'.[53]

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[50] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 177–8.
[51] This concept is found in the Macarian Homilies.
[52] *Homily 37*, trans Miller (1984) 177–8.
[53] *Homily 75*, trans Miller (1984) 367.

So what sense can be made of this austere yet passionate figure? Isaac's *Homilies* have been described by their own translator as inpenetrable and obscure in meaning. Much of the difficulty arises from Isaac's preoccupation with religious anthropology. The reader may become burdened and distracted by technical language of hierarchies and stages of development which at times conceal important insights into the great mystery of humankind, created in God's image and yearning to return to the divine presence. Isaac writes from within a monastic tradition in which practical experience is the criteria for authority. As well as his own experience of weeping, attested in his writings, he reiterates those of St Paul and St John of Apamea. These earlier exponents of the tradition are also much concerned with religious anthropology, and this area discloses Isaac's specific insights into the human condition. In understanding weeping as expressing the integrity of body and soul at their highest point, Isaac comments on the essence of what it is to be human. Penitents who achieve the complex balance between the opposing forces of nature within themselves become most fully human, that is, most God-like. Isaac describes how through weeping, one enters the presence of God, and truly penitent tears enable the weeper to stand repristinated in the divine presence. The one who weeps enters into a state of ecstacy that completes the physical process of withdrawal from the world. The monk's title of 'mourner' is invoked to emphasise that weeping recreates self. It is a description of the spiritually perfected person's very identity and purpose for living.

In his insistence on humility, silence, and repeated self-discipline Isaac mirrors the classic desert experiences of Klimakos. Like Ephrem, and other writers, such as Symeon the New Theologian, he uses the image of repentance as rebirth, noting the pains involved, and the need to separate the new spiritual infant from its mother. The sorrow experienced by such a separation he describes as essential to the process of spiritual maturation. He identifies within this a concept which was to be developed in more detail by Symeon the New Theologian, namely that repentance expressed by tears corroborates and completes the intention of conversion undertaken in baptism. The consciousness of mourning is important to Isaac, because within the human being there is a mind capable not only of thoughts but empowered to make choices. This is why he values more the weeping that does not come so naturally, not because the effort to weep is virtuous, but because an innate sorrowfulness is insufficiently deliberate to have real merit.

So Isaac is concerned with finding and maintaining the balance

within the human person between opposing desires. He is concerned with the intention behind the action, with the integrity which is achieved through repentant mourning. The mourner is in the process of being transformed into authentic personhood, through God's grace. His very identity is discovered through returning to his pre-fallen condition as God's creature. Two other types of balance are emphasised in his writings. One is that of fear and love of God. He tells us that repentance is the ship piloted by fear towards the divine haven of love. The fear, of God's wrath, of judgment and eternal punishment, literally motivate the penitent, but is not an end in itself. The harbour is mercy, the resting place, the return to safety and consolation. Weeping is the dynamic by which the monk approaches his Maker, in an intimate encounter which is likened to a key Biblical paradigm: the solitary's cell is 'the cleft in the rock where God spoke with Moses'.[54]

For Isaac, the monk's perpetual labour of mourning for sin forms an encounter with the living God, whose Son in his life and death becomes the prototype for suffering and grief for sin. Isaac describes in his theology of mourning an awareness of both individual sins and communal failings. This balance between self and other is most graphically illustrated by his insistence that weepers are participating in the sufferings of Christ. Grief for their own sins show the love and fear which is owed to God: their compassion for the sins of others reflects the selfless passion of Christ.

In his focus on the issue of ascetic endeavour and human integrity Isaac demonstrates his inheritance of both the earlier Syrian tradition and the less heart-centered approach of the Hellenistic world. He adds to these his own emphasis on weeping as something which raises the penitent to God's presence, in a state of perfection which cannot be achieved without full integrity of all components of the human being. The mourner not only encounters God in this ecstatic experience, he or she also participates in the life of Christ. Isaac prefigures Symeon the New Theologian in maintaining the tradition of seeing tears as a baptism which confirms the initial entry into God's Church. His significance for not only the Syrian Church but for the wider Christian tradition cannot be ignored.

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[54] *Homily 25*, trans Miller (1984) 125.

SECTION V

‘YOU WILL SEE HIM WHOM NO MAN HAS SEEN:’ SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN’S REAPPROPRIATION OF THE DESERT TEACHINGS

CHAPTER TEN

CONTEXT AND BIOGRAPHY

Symeon the New Theologian in some ways exemplifies the Byzantine man of this period: conservative, political, complex and controversial. A profound spirituality and fervour is found in his life and writings which is in part a response to and rejection of the excesses of Byzantine society. There is also ambiguity in that it is clear that Symeon was willing to use both patronage and wealth as tools in building, literally as well as figuratively, for the glory of God. Whichever set of dates is accepted for him (this controversy being dealt with in detail by Alfeyev),[1] Symeon lived much of his life under the reign of Basil II who represented the zenith of the Macedonian Dynasty. In his writings, the spiritual heritage of desert monasticism and the Syrians is absorbed, and overlaid with a distinctive understanding of the centrality of *penthos*. Penitent weeping acts as the filter through which Symeon views the whole gamut of Christian living. It colours his understanding of religious anthropology, the human experience of God, participation in the body of Christ, and *theosis* itself. Mourning for sin has moved from the margins to the very centre of the religious discourse. Above all, Symeon asserts that it is through penitent weeping that 'you will see him whom no man has ever seen'.[2] Coming three centuries after Isaac and Klimakos, Symeon synthesises the earlier traditions and points the way to the hesychast revival of the fourteenth Century. The rich expanse of extant writings should be approached with the constant awareness that for Symeon personal experience of God was the key to salvation. He may not use the overtly apophatic language of Dionysius, but his emphasis on the physical expression of holy mysteries, be it in visions of light, or tears of penitent grief, is a constant reminder that words are not enough. The inevitable irony therefore comes into play, that the mystical and the ecstatic must be explored through the verbal and written. First,

[1] (2000) 27–42.
[2] *Ch* 1, 101, SC 51, p. 70, trans McGuckin (1992) 62.

Symeon should be placed in his context, with some preliminary notes about his life and reception by the contemporary and later church.

The primary source for the chronology of Symeon's life, apart from his own writings, is the *Vita* composed by Nicetas Stethatos.[3] Stethatos claims to have been commissioned by Symeon, towards the end of his life, to record some biographical details for posterity.[4] Some 13 years after Symeon's death, this charge was augmented, via a dream vision of Symeon, to include the editing and publication of his writings,[5] an event which reiterates the hagiographical lens through which the *Vita* is conceived. The hagiographical basis to the biography was further complicated by Symeon's controversial relationship with his spiritual father. This provided Stethatos with a life shaped by an empirical experience of the succession of illumination through spiritual fatherhood, and simultaneously the risk of this adherence to spiritual fatherhood being seen as a cult. The fact that it took thirty years for Symeon's remains to be brought back to Constantinople is perhaps evidence of the ambivalence of his reputation, and after the death of Nicetas in the 1090s, little is heard of Symeon's reputation until the Hesychast revival in the fourteenth century.

Symeon's own writings also provide some clues about his life, and even some descriptions of particular events. In his homilies and letters, he describes his spiritual journey, as well as supplying some more general autobiographical facts. For example, the account of one of his visions of light in *Catechesis 22*, reveals the likely baptismal name of George.[6] Elsewhere Symeon records significant aspects of his growth towards ascetic maturity, such as the need for an appropriate spiritual father and his joy at finding such a guide,[7] his willingness to submit to the discipline of the elder,[8] his mystical visions accompanied by

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[3] Ed Hausherr and Horn (1928). Hereafter cited as *Life*, with the paragraph number and page number of Hausherr's edition given. References to texts by Symeon the New Theologian and Symeon Eulabes will be referred to by reference to the primary source as found in SC or PG as appropriate, with the page number of the relevant English translation.

[4] *Life* 14, 188–90.

[5] *Life* 14, 200–206.

[6] *Cat* 22, l 22, SC 104, 366, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 243.

[7] *Euch* 1 and 2, SC 113, 304ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 359ff., *Ch* 1, 49, SC 51, 53, trans McGuckin (1982) 45–6, *Epistle* 3, *Hymn* 4, 25ff., SC 156, 192, *Cat* 16, 9ff., SC 104, 236–8, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 198.

[8] *Ch* 1, 21–30, SC 51, 45–8, trans 38–41; *Ch* 1, 55–56, SC 51, 55, trans McGuckin (1982) 47; *Ch* 1, 60–62, SC 51, 56–7, trans McGuckin (1982) 48–49.

tears.[9] He also describes the ecstatic encounters with the Spirit which convinced him that direct, personal experiences of the Living God are fundamental, even axiomatic, to being a Christian.[10] In some places, Symeon observes the convention of referring to himself in the third person, perhaps as a conscious echo of St Paul.[11]

The first substantial Western academic interest shown in Symeon in modern times was Holl's *Enthusiasmus und Bussegewalt beim griechischen Mönchtum* of 1898. This study raises a particularly significant questions in relation to Symeon, namely that he has a 'theology of tears'.[12] This suggestion is followed by many subsequent commentators, but needs careful appraisal. It implies, as so much western religious thought does, that theology and doctrine can be rationalised, defined, scholastically dissected and separated into roots and component parts. As already noted, this is inimical to the basis of eastern Christendom, in which the theologian is one who prays, and vice versa.[13] Symeon is a theologian, in his practical life of prayer and penitence as much as in his written legacy. His 'theology' is praxis and theoria enmeshed. The value of Holl's comment lies in his observation that for Symeon, spiritual grief is *the* defining experience of his religious life. This offers a balance to the subsequent popular focus on Symeon's light mysticism, his loyalty to the concept and practice of spiritual fatherhood, and various arguments as to the reasons for his neglect by subsequent cultures until recent years. By articulating the centrality of weeping in Symeon's life and thought, Holl provides a starting point for this chapter. Substantial matters of doctrine are illuminated for Symeon through his experience and understanding of tears but more than that, the presence of tears in itself confers pneumatic authority, because they provide proof of the presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the heart of each Christian. He must be seen in his Byzantine context, and not through post-enlightenment Jesuitical eyes. Golitzin shows a fine sensitivity to this problem of perspective, noting that 'We

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[9] *Ch* 1, 35, SC 51, 49–50, trans McGuckin (1982) 42, *Cat* 22, 89–105, SC 104, 372, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 245–6, *Cat* 16, 80–108, SC 104, 244–6, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 200–1.

[10] *Ch* 1, 21, SC 51, 45, trans McGuckin (1982) 77–8; *Ch* 1, 53, SC 51, 54, trans McGuckin (1982) 46.

[11] *Cat* 22, 22ff., SC 104, 366, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 243; *Cat* 16, l 8, SC 104, 236, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 198.

[12] See the section on Symeon's theology, 36–103.

[13] Evagrios, *Chapters on Prayer*, 60, attrib Nilus, PG 79 (1865), 1180B, trans Bamberger (1981) 65.

do not mean to mock a Hausherr or a Darrouzès, but it would not be entirely unfair to see them in their turn as influenced by the debates arising out of the reform and counter-reform, and thus as reading Symeon through spectacles fashioned largely by the sixteenth century.'[14]

Holl's preliminary investigations are acknowledged by Petit,[15] whose appraisal was published posthumously and completed by Hausherr. This work affirms Nicetas Stethatos as the author of the *Vita*. Subsequent studies include the first part of Krivocheine's *St Symeon the New Theologian: Life-Spirituality-Doctrine*,[16] (which is the only section of the book which is largely Krivocheine's own words rather than those of Symeon himself), and McGuckin's introduction to his translation of *The Practical and Theological Chapters and Three Theological Discourses*[17] which provides a compact summary of both the chronology and the main issues of Symeon's life. More recently, McGuckin has published a more detailed account of the historical problems associated with the *Vita*,[18] in which he stresses the significance of the political and social context of Symeon's life, and in particular the issue of patronage. Alfeyev takes issue with some of these findings.[19] Golitzin devotes a substantial part of his recent three volume translation of the *Ethical Discourses* to Symeon's life and the reliability of the *Vita*.[20] All these more recent assessments refer to Holl.

The life of Symeon reveals a rich mixture of worldly and spiritual influences. More than many of those who became revered as saints, his role within Byzantine society was both clearly articulated, and the source of some conflict. If Hausherr's and McGuckin's chronology is accepted,[21] he was born c. AD 949 to wealthy parents in Galatia, in Paphlagonia. At the age of 11 he was moved to his uncle's house in Constantinople, where he was to receive a secular education. In addition to this, the young man commenced a political career, which was to lead ultimately to his holding the position of *spatha cubicularius*.[22]

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[14] Golitzin (1997) 51.
[15] (1928).
[16] (1986) 15–63.
[17] (1982) 11–30.
[18] (1995/6).
[19] (2000) Part I, I.
[20] (1997) 7–184.
[21] Holl gives dates of c. 939–9 to 1041/2, (1989) 23–26; Alfeyev (2000) 28 cites the Greek patrologist Christou, who suggests 956–1036 being appropriate dates of Symeon's life. Alfeyev prefers these dates to the previously established ones.
[22] Turner (1990) 18–22, states that up to the sixth century, this post was only

This was a minor court dignatory, originally conceived as a sword-bearer. However, by the eighth century it was likely to have been merely an honorary title, and certainly not a post which could only be held by a eunuch, as had been the case earlier in the Byzantine period. This pattern of court officialdom was curtailed when his uncle died only three years later, 'ushered out of life by no ordinary death'.[23] This death virtually coincided with the death of Romanus the Second, a young Emperor who had ruled for only three and a half years. His death was ostensibly caused by a hunting injury (his prediliction for hunting during Lent had attracted disapproval). Romanus' heir being only 5 years old, the Emperor's widow, Theophano, approached Nicephorus Phocas for support and he engineered a coup against the powerful grand chamberlain, Joseph Bringas.[24] The effects of this political coup included the overthrow of the ruling Court, a factor which may have contributed to the young man's decision to flee to the Studite monastery in Constantinople, since the status quo which secured his political patronage had been curtailed. Symeon's time at court marked him, however: it provides the source for some of his more secular imagery, according to Kazhdan.[25]

For Symeon, there followed a brief interlude of withdrawal from the affairs of the world. He met Symeon, known as Eulabes, who advised him to read Mark the Hermit's *The Spiritual Law*,[26] Klimakos' writings, and those of Diadochos, and to adopt a life of prayer and penitence, which he claims to have attempted, at least in his leisure from worldly service. He returned to Court and became a senator,[27] during a further period of political instability. This was a transitional time for Symeon. Guided by Eulabes, he grieved for his sins, which he presents as being very grave,[28] tempted as he was by the licentious-

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granted to eunuchs. McGuckin, however, points out that Nicetas chose to envisage Symeon as a eunuch in order to ratify his authorial authority: see (1996) 19, footnote 4. By the time of Symeon this post was not the prerogative of eunuchs. See also ed Khazhdan (1991) vol. 3, 1935–6.

[23] *Life* 3, 6.

[24] See Treadgold (1997) 494–498ff.

[25] 'The rich imagery of Symeon's works is dominated by two typically Byzantine themes: palace life centred on the figure of the emperor and the circle of merchants and craftsmen' (A. Kazhdan in *Unser ganzes Leben Christus unserem Gott uberantworten* (1982) 221–39). This is quoted on page 1987 of vol. 3 of the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*.

[26] *Cat* 22, 20ff., SC 104, 366, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 244.

[27] *Life* 4–6, 6ff.

[28] *Hymn* 24, 71–79 (M, 127) trans Maloney (1975) 127, quoted Golitzin (1997) 27.

ness of Constantinople and the opportunities for debauchery offered by life at Court. Symeon relates that after his work was completed each day, he would pray, and 'Every evening tears welled from his eyes; more and more frequently he prostrated himself with his face to the ground'.[29]

He experienced the first of his visions of light, in which his mind ascended from earth to heaven where he saw his spiritual father surrounded by light. The reference to Eulabes' advice in this vision affirms the centrality of spiritual direction in Symeon's life, a construct he develops into the idea of the 'golden chain' of charismatic power. Light mysticism is a very important part of this experience, and seems to have led to much employment of light and fire imagery by Symeon, in subsequent writings; however, the significant factor in this vision is that in the midst of the brightest light, Symeon sees his spiritual father, who is not only accorded parity with the angels but also passes on that sanctity through the guidance he is giving to his disciple. So the significance of this ecstatic vision is not so much the presence of the light, as the appearance of his holy mentor within that light, and the ratification given to spiritual fatherhood.

Back home, he read Klimakos, which inspired him to pray at the tombs, and to remember his closeness to death.[30] In 977, Symeon decided to abandon the Court and enter the monastery permanently. After a year of close discipleship,[31] which caused some jealousy at the Studion,[32] Symeon's spiritual father arranged for him to be tonsured at the nearby monastery of St Mamas, where he was ordained priest in 980. Within another two years, the young monk succeeded higumen Antony, who had admitted him, becoming Abbot on Antony's death.

For an educated aristocrat, such rapid advancement was not unusual. However, it is important to remember the youth of this higumen, and the considerable and prolonged secular temptations to which he had been exposed. Nicetas presents the situation at St Mamas as in sore need of the reforms of his subject: he claims it had become a refuge for dissolute men.[33] The exhortatory tone and content of the *Catecheses* Symeon wrote for his monks there perhaps substantiates this claim: however, Nicetas' hagiographic perspective must always

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[29] *Cat* 22, 74ff., SC 104, 370, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 245.
[30] *Life* 6, 12.
[31] *Life* 11, 18 describes how Symeon slept under the stairs of his master's cell.
[32] *Life* 20–21, 30.
[33] *Life* 34, 46. McGuckin (1996) argues for this being a false *topos*.

be borne in mind. Nicetas portrays Symeon as an enthusiastic reformer and administrator at this period (he remained as higoumenon for 25 years) who transformed the monastery into a focus of spirituality and good discipline. McGuckin points out that Nicetas probably exaggerated both the dissoluteness of the abbot and the physical decay of the monastery in order to exaggerate the impact Symeon made on the monastic life of the time. McGuckin also comments on the place of patronage in contemporary monasticism.[34] The *Vita* obviously needs to be read with a realistic understanding of Nicetas's own aim of vindicating his hero, and also with an eye to Symeon's own position within his society. He entered a monastery reputed to contain men who were 'worldly' perhaps in the sense of having, like him, enjoyed considerable status and influence in the world, as well as plenty of money. No amount of zeal alone could have effected the physical rebuilding Symeon undertook, both at St Mamas and St Marina: the fact that he was able to rebuild a foundation, from ruins, within a short period of time, and the account of a search made of his premises for gold at the time of his trial[35] suggest that Symeon is at least suspected of having retained some of his personal wealth when he became a monk.

After the death of Eulabes in c. 986/987, Symeon engaged in what came to be seen as a contentious cult of his spiritual father.[36] A decade later there was an uprising during one of his sermons. Lack of contemporary evidence about the size and disposition of the monastery leaves unanswered the question of how large scale this revolt was.[37] Some claim it was as many as 30 monks who tried to attack their Abbot. Symeon is reported as having sought out each rebel, who was exiled, and prayed with him to return and accept his pardon.[38] Nicetas follows this account of mutiny with a long description of Symeon's relations with his own spiritual child, Arsenius, whom Symeon appointed as his successor when he stood down as Abbot,[39] on the

[34] (1996) 24ff.
[35] McGuckin (1996) 25.
[36] *Life* 72, 98. This comprised the composition of a *Vita*, and a *Kontakia*, together with the introduction of a yearly office and feast day. Although Nicetas presents this as a major reason for Symeon's subsequent deposition, the cult remained unchallenged until 1009. See McGuckin (1982) 16 for fuller details.
[37] Charanis (1971) gives some putative details, suggesting that the vast majority of Byzantine monasteries housed 10–20 monks. A rebellion of thirty in this context would be a substantial mutiny.
[38] *Life* 41, 54.
[39] *Life* 59, 78.

advice of Patriarch Sergius II. Nicetas thus uses the events he describes in the *Vita* to weight his portrayal of Symeon as a conscientious father to his spiritual children. Exaggeration of the number of rebels would give further scope to this intention.

This affair was not the end of Symeon's conflict, for he soon attracted the hostility of Stephen, Metropolitan of Nicomedia.[40] Among the issues raised, the most pertinent in this context derives from his trial in 1009, when Symeon refuses to accept teaching about God from one who has not experienced divine power at first hand. In particular, Symeon questioned the automatic right of a priest to absolve sin, emphasising that the power to bind and loose sins is not the prerogative of holy orders, but of 'personal holiness and spiritual charisms'.[41] Furthermore, his attitude to baptism gave scope for the accusation that he did not revere this sacrament, insisting as he did on the need for conscious, willing acceptance of the Holy Spirit as the corroboration of baptism administered to an intellectually unaware infant.[42] The issues of spiritual authority and Symeon's understanding of the meaning of baptism will be explored in more depth shortly: this issue of empirical knowledge conferring spiritual authority is bound up with spiritual grief and weeping. Here it should be noted that the conflict with Stephen of Nicomedia reveals the interplay of political, personal and spiritual issues that is the hallmark of Symeon's life.[43] As a result of Symeon's trial in 1009[44] he was exiled from Constantinople and continued his monastic career at a monastery, identified variously as that of St Marina,[45] Marinus and Macrina[46] where once again he built up a community.[47] He died on 12 March 1022.

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[40] *Life* 74–5, 100–102. Krivocheine gives an analysis of Nicetas' account of this debate. (1986) 45ff.

[41] McGuckin (1982) 19.

[42] McGuckin (1982) 21.

[43] Hussey (1970) 131–2, notes that there were political as well as doctrinal reasons for Symeon's exile. See also McGuckin (1995/6).

[44] *Life* 74ff., 100ff.

[45] The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium (1298) gives the background here. Marinus/Marina was a hermit, presumed to be a man, at the death of whom the corpse was discovered to be that of a woman, hence the variants of the name with both masculine and feminine endings. This *topos* recurs in the desert fathers, and seems to be one way of allowing a woman to be seen as holy. Maloney in his introduction to de Cantazaro (1980) 14 gives Marina; Krivocheine (1986) 53 and 59 gives Marines; McGuckin (1982) 2 gives Marinus.

[46] Golitzin (1997) 37. This is dubious. The *Vita* gives no very clear evidence in favour of this reading, and perhaps a confusion has been made with the Cappadocian Macrina?

[47] *Life* 101ff., 140ff.

It seems likely that the title 'New Theologian' is both appropriate and expedient: it was originally accorded as an ironic or mischevious attempt to undermine Symeon's standing soon after his death, a device which his disciples rapidly turned to their own advantage.[48] Symeon's direct and powerfully felt encounters with God give empirical authority to his status as 'theologian': his writings articulated mystical union, thus justifying his parity with John the Apostle and Gregory of Nazianzus, the other patristic holders of the term. 'New' requires more explanation. Innovation is antithetical to the eastern Christian understanding of tradition, though it is tempting to see the uniqueness of Symeon as comprising original ideas. Sterk explains the title is due to him as being 'the founder of a neo-hesychasm', though this reads like a retrospective through the lens of Gregory Palamas.[49] A comparison to Gregory Nazianzus is helpful here. Like Gregory, Symeon was an excellent poet-theologian. Like John, he writes empirically of encounters with the living God which constitute the truest tradition of the Church. The 'new' may then suggest not originality and innovation, but a sense of an additional theologian worthy of note, in the mould of the two already accorded that title. His description as 'younger', intended to distinguish him from Eulabes, also serves to point out that he is the latest in the golden chain of charismatics.

[48] Golitzin (1997) 7–11, McGuckin (1999) and Spidlik (1988) col. 1387. Turner (1990) 36, believes likewise, and attributes this assumption to Hausherr's introduction to the *Life*, LXXIX. He also refers the reader to Krivocheine's introduction to the *Catecheses*, SC 96 (1963) 53, note 1, and 155–157. See also Gouillard (1941) col 2942.

[49] (1988) 18. See also McGuckin (1982) 24.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SYMEON'S SOURCES AND INFLUENCES: MESSALIANISM, DONATISM AND MACARIUS

Penitent tears are the lynchpin of Symeon's spiritual teaching. Whilst he bases this on personal experience, he is also strongly influenced and inspired by the life and teachings of his spiritual master, so Eulabes' life and example need to be read as one of the chief external sources for Symeon the Younger. The other major source for Symeon, as for many of the Fathers, was a broadbased saturation in Scripture.

Symeon's work draws on a rich seam of Biblical knowledge. McGuckin's careful analysis of the particular biblical passages which underlie Symeon's visions of light[1] provides a good methodology for Symeon studies in general. The Psalter in particular provides the basis for common practice of monastic reading/recitation, taken from texts chosen by the spiritual father to best meet the needs of the individual. Psalms expressing penitence and remorse were commonly used.[2] A detailed analysis of Symeon's range of citation would reveal a pervasive dependence on Scripture. For example, a passage in *Catechesis 15* exploring the concept of God as the light of the soul, has 16 citations in 30 lines of text, ranging from Genesis, Psalms, the first Letter to John, and the Gospels.[3] The final passage of *Catechesis 19*[4] quotes Matthew, Mark, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, 1 Timothy, 2 Thessalonians, Psalm 68, and the book of Wisdom. As well as citing and referring to particular texts, Symeon also uses a Biblical mode of rhetoric. His experience and description of visions and dreams suggests a prophetic interpretation of his life events. Like the Bible, his work includes sermons and hymns of praise. His visions of light are strongly reminiscent of the Transfiguration, in revealing the person of Eulabes in the Divine light, in a transformed condition. Holy Scripture moulds Symeon's mode of utterance, and is also one of the two most important stimuli to his spiritual development.

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[1] (1996).
[2] Turner (1990) 43.
[3] 67–99, SC 104, 228–30, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 195–6.
[4] 146–174, SC104, 326–8, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 230.

The impact of Symeon's secular education is modest. Stethatos, in underplaying his subject's verbal ability, employs the typical topos of sanctity, suggesting that Symeon relied humbly on inner spiritual resources rather than great educational ability. The writings themselves reveal extraordinary eloquence in conjunction with deep spiritual insights. In choosing to emphasise the eloquence of Stephen of Nicomedia in contradistinction to Symeon's gift of the Holy Spirit,[5] Symeon's biographer is using polemic rather than historical accuracy. Stethatos refers to the scorn expressed by Stephen of Nicomedia that Symeon remained 'silent and unable to utter one word when surrounded by men wise in the art of literary criticism',[6] and reads it as evidence of humility rather than ignorance on the part of Symeon.

There remains the question of how 'well read' Symeon was in the fathers, regardless of his saturation or otherwise in secular texts and pedagogy. Certainly, Symeon is relatively short on detailed citation of earlier fathers, and other studies provide the statistics on this.[7] But this does not necessarily indicate that Symeon could not read fluently, nor that he had failed to receive a basic grounding in patristic and scriptural knowledge. Symeon himself tells the reader that the basic texts offered to him by Eulabes, in addition to Holy Scripture, were Mark the Hermit and Klimakos, eremitic texts which were widely used also in coenobitic contexts. That he read and absorbed such works is evident from his own writing, not by direct citation but through the subject matter and language of his homilies and chapters. Symeon's visions of light indicate that he was acquainted with the writings of Gregory of Nazianzus. Modern commentators have sought to define the 'synthesis' of monastic schools in Symeon,[8] and it would be interesting to discover evidence of whether Symeon had encountered the Greek translations of Isaac, completed at Mar Sabas in the ninth century; internal evidence gives no incontestable leads about this. Hausherr is convinced that he had encountered the writings of Isaac.

Symeon's reading of his 'sources' was not always conventional, as demonstrated by the example cited in McGuckin[9] of the slant Symeon

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[5] *Life* 74, 100.
[6] *Life* 74, 100–102.
[7] See for example Turner (1990), especially 46–50.
[8] McGuckin describes Symeon's spiritual doctrine as 'a synthesis of . . . the Alexandrian or Sinaitic tradition, and the Macarian school' (1982) 25 and cites Meyendorff's view that there is a synthesis of Klimakos and Theodore the Studite.
[9] (1997).

places on Mark the Hermit's *Spiritual Law*.[10] Symeon uses an anti-Messalian polemic to point out the importance of 'internal mystical experience as a canon of grace',[11] apparently the reverse of what its author intended. McGuckin's analysis of this demonstrates that the chief significance of Symeon's reading is less in what or how much he read, as in his internalisation and interpretation of it. Symeon uses his own consciousness of having experienced God's grace as the benchmark for Christian life. According to McGuckin, this slant defines tradition as something very much in the present, not ossified in the past:

> Symeon, in short, has internalized the tradition to an extraordinary degree, and rendered it 'personalist' in a particularly intense way. The authentic tradition of Christianity, therefore, is suggested to be a common and shared inner experience rather than a body of agreed external data . . . (providing) . . . an interesting and fertile theology of tradition, one which does not so much look to the past to prove continuity with the present, but looks to the present to demonstrate its communion with the past.[12]

The whole concept of tradition, or paradosis, to use the appropriate Byzantine term, is of huge significance in approaching Symeon. McGuckin thus expands Ware's advice of 25 years previously, to understand tradition in 'contemporary terms' because the Spirit continues to teach and lead.[13] Symeon's references to and citation from the canon of patristic 'sources' show both his newness and his conservatism. He does not refer to obscure texts, nor does he pepper his own writings with those of his precursors. He acknowledges the traditional insights he has gained from Klimakos and Mark the Hermit, but concentrates on those aspects of their teaching which accorded with his own experience. In particular, he reiterates that participation in Christ is effected by direct encounters with God, which in his own case he declares to be accompanied by luminous tears and grief for sin. To claim to be writing from experience is a monastic norm; what comprises the 'newness' of Symeon's theology is that that not only is he writing from experience, but he insists that it is that very experience which confers authority on what he writes.

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[10] Symeon claims he is quoting from this text; in fact the specific references he makes are to its companion piece in the manuscripts, *On those who think they can be justified by works*.

[11] McGuckin (1997) 82/3.

[12] (1997) 81 and 89.

[13] Ware (1972) 138.

Similar emphasis on experiential modes of authority can be found in Maximos the Confessor.

This leads to questions about the relationship between Symeon and the Messalians. Some recent commentators suggest that certain aspects of Symeon's teachings laid him open to the charge of Messalianism. The particular issues include his emphasis on the primacy of personal experience, the vision of God being potentially granted to the living, and the incompleteness of water baptism.[14] Turner[15] cites Deppe,[16] who is astonished that Symeon was never officially accused of Messalianism. Turner is more convinced than McGuckin that there are Messalian leanings in Symeon and claims that only his social standing safeguarded him against being denounced as a heretic, a privilege not shared by all his contemporaries. However, what is known of Messalianism points to a fourth century movement, and the application of this to Symeon, living in a totally different context some seven centuries later, is an example of eisegesis, led by Holl, and has little credibility. Symeon's concern with personal experience is derived from his conviction that Christian faith is rooted in its practice, an experience of the indwelling Spirit in addition to an idiomatic rule of prayer, and looking to the mercy of Christ, not the merit of personal achievement, as salvific.

Far from sharing the Messalian's scorn for the sacraments, Symeon expresses great reverence for them. Indeed, it is because he holds them in such high regard that he is concerned that they should be administered by appropriately holy people, with an awareness that it is the grace empowering the sacrament that is of importance, not the outward ritual. Hatzopolous, whose thesis makes a detailed study of the issue, concludes:

> When Symeon speaks of Baptism in the Spirit, he means the grace of the renewal of sacramental Baptism. It is the same grace of the Spirit that makes water-Baptism a sacrament, which in turn makes possible the gradual renewal of the image.[17]

Such comments help refute the accusations of Messalianism against Symeon's handling of the sacramental life: not only do these accusations suggest a misinterpretation of Symeon's concept of charism and sacra-

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[14] Krivocheine provides a useful note on this issue (1986) 31–2 note 19.
[15] (1990) 366.
[16] (1971).
[17] (1991) 135.

mentality, but they also belonging to a period and place far removed from Symeon's own lifetime. More convincing and relevant is the issue of whether Symeon was directly aware of the teachings of Macarius, again an area well covered by Hatzopolous.[18] He believes that there is no proof that Symeon had been exposed to Macarius' homilies, though there are similarities. He suggests that Symeon and Macarius are both using a common current of spirituality, and he isolates no fewer than fifteen points of comparison between the two, concluding that neither deserve to be described as 'Messalian' in their teachings. In common with many Fathers in the Eastern Christian tradition, Macarius makes some mention of tears, and when he does so, his interpretation of weeping is similar to that of Symeon. He makes the common monastic connection between tears and repentance, seeing penitential weeping as efficacious in restoring the image of God.[19] He also employs the image of weeping as clothing the penitent in the holy garment from heaven, an image which recalls not only some of Symeon's language, but also the Syrian use of wedding garment imagery.[20] Like Symeon, Macarius distinguishes between painful tears of suffering, and sweet tears, which are the gift of the Holy Spirit.[21] Izard[22] and McGuckin[23] also refer to the Macarian feel of Symeon's writing.

There are obviously points of contact between the two, such as an emphasis on the heart-centeredness of Christian experience, and the need for humility and awe of God, and a common concern to avoid a quasi-Messalian complacency about personal perfection. However, there does not seem to be sufficient proof in terms of direct citation of either texts or ideas to claim that Symeon had definitely read Macarius, rather than having dipped into the same ascetic pool. Symeon directly refers only rarely to any other writers, and so an argument from silence cannot be warranted. It is possible that the common emphasis on tears derived from both Macarius and Symeon having experienced the charism of weeping, which in the case of Symeon predisposed him to develop the concept of grieving for sin into a major theological thread in his teaching. The writings of Isaac of Nineveh were almost

[18] (1983) especially 43ff.
[19] *Homily* 15, 17, 222; L32, 6 p. II 20, 25 (cited Hatzopoulos (1991)) 167.
[20] *Homily* 20, 1, 2; L12, 1, 1 pl. 151, 2 (cited Hatzopoulos (1991)) 167.
[21] Hatzopolous (1991) 169.
[22] (1990) 93.
[23] (1982) 25.

certainly available to Symeon, having been translated and introduced to Byzantium in the tenth century. Symeon's texts suggest a synthesis of both Isaac and the earlier Syrian tradition, to which Macarius belonged. Perhaps the most plausible explanation for these common threads lies in the prevalent Biblical instances of penitence and weeping which were so much the heritage of all monastic writing.

CHAPTER TWELVE

EULABES AS THE NEW THEOLOGIAN'S PRIME SOURCE

In order to understand the other main 'source' in Symeon's thinking, it is necessary to look at the background to monastic practices of spiritual fatherhood. Turner's full-length study of the issue,[1] and other subsequent articles,[2] articulate the prevailing traditional position that spiritual fatherhood was the norm in monastic life, and constituted an essential element in the development of the spiritual athlete. However, it is possible that there were other reasons for this practice. Morris's more recent and sociological analysis offers an alternative opinion, suggesting that 'contrary to theological teaching, the possession of a spiritual father in Byzantium was often not so much a mark of spirituality as of social distinction'.[3]

In the case of Symeon, his religious life is catalysed by the political events of the day, and his privileged social position afforded him benefits not available to others, such as possible immunity from accusations of Messalianism. Whatever the external context, if the internal evidence of both Symeons' writings is examined, it is clear that for Eulabes and his pupil, spiritual fatherhood was seen as essential and as something which moulded the younger man's thinking and spiritual growth. As McGuckin has noted, the 'doctrine of the primacy of the spiritual father' is one of the 'supreme principles of his thought'.[4] Symeon mentions his spiritual father in the *Catecheses, Ethical Discourses, The Chapters and Theological Discourses*, the *Hymns* and his *Letters*. The ubiquitous presence of Eulabes' example helps the younger Symeon define his own spiritual identity, and moulds his development as Abbot. McGuckin describes the practice of spiritual fatherhood as one of the

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[1] (1990).

[2] Turner (1989) 92–4.

[3] (1993) 288. In her later work (1995) 56, she modifies this slightly, suggesting that whereas in the *lavra* spiritual direction was universal, in kenobitic situations it was the exception.

[4] (1997) 78.

'supreme principles of his thought', the other being the importance of tears.[5] Alfeyev[6] notes the significance of Eulabes on Symeon's external and internal life, and concludes that it was not so much pedagogy as a shared empirical mysticism which so influenced the younger man. Symeon's 'cult' of Eulabes seriously compromised his own standing in Byzantine monastic and social culture, and for such an astute and sophisticated man as Symeon to be prepared to take this risk suggests a very deep devotion to his mentor. The intensity of this attachment was such that it informed Symeon's theological thought as well as his personal growth.

The dates of Symeon Eulabes (henceforth to be referred to as Eulabes, to distinguish him from his pupil) are c. 917–986/7. He was a monk of the Studium at Constantinople, and was never ordained to clerical rank. His influence on his disciples was largely by his life and example but there is now evidence that he left a written legacy as well, in the form of an *Ascetic Discourse*, probably written between 970 and 990.[7] This was originally attributed to his pupil and it was only at the end of the eighteenth century that the Greek scholar, Dionysius Zagoraios was able to identify confidently that Eulabes' own work had been isolated. As late as 1995, this work was still portrayed as being associated with Symeon the Younger: Numbers 119–152 of the *One Hundred and Fifty Three Practical and Theological Texts* attributed to Symeon the New Theologian, are described in *The Philokalia* volume 4 as 'by the New Theologian's teacher, St. Symeon the Studite'.[8] This has now been published by Sources Chrétiennes according to Alfeyev's edition.[9]

Contemporary portrayals of him suggest an element of eccentricity in his behaviour, particularly his flouting of the monastic convention of modesty about the naked body,[10] which may in fact mean no more than that he attended the baths. Opinion is divided as to

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[5] (1997) 78.

[6] (1994) 183, 221 and see also his doctoral dissertation (1995).

[7] Alfeyev (1994) 198–200 deals with the manuscript tradition and its discovery in modern times.

[8] These form pages 50–62 of volume 4 of *The Philokalia*.

[9] (2001).

[10] Symeon defends this in *Hymn* 15, 205–214, SC 156, 294; see also Turner (1990) 63–4. Rydén (1981) 111ff., gives a detailed discussion of this issue. See also Krivocheine (1986) 358–9.

whether this eccentricity constituted the behaviour of a *salos*.[11] Ware[12] reminds us that abhorence of nakedness was normative from the time of St. Antony, at least according to the *Vita* by Athanasius,[13] and he follows Symeon's belief that Eulabes' source for this apparent immodesty was a literal interpretation of 1 Cor. 6.15. Golitzin explores the idea of being a 'holy fool' in his thorough study of Symeon.[14]

The teachings of Eulabes are expounded both in the texts mentioned above, and through citation and exposition by his pupil. Eulabes combined the conventional Byzantine teaching on obedience and humility with an emphasis on the importance of penitent tears: Alfeyev denotes these as the *leitmotiv* of the entire work.[15] Eulabes particularly emphasizes the need to weep when assisting at the Divine Office;[16] when receiving communion;[17] that such tears should be for others, not oneself;[18] and that tears of compunction are directly related to divine illumination.[19] His spiritual child built on these foundations, and was also emphatic about the need for a spiritual guide such as he had been blessed with, and from this imperative, he developed his concept of the 'golden chain' of living saints, which confers spiritual authority within the wider Church. As the conflict with Stephen of Nicomedia has shown, the whole area of spiritual authority and its transmission is fundamental to the religious thought world of Symeon, and this will be developed shortly. The discipline of obedience in the lives of the two Symeons is an essential starting point.

Eulabes stresses that obedience is a prime aspect of discipleship. This of course is not an arrogant assumption of moral superiority, rather, Eulabes knows that his authority as spiritual father is entrusted to him as an agent and mediator of God's mercy, so the disciple should 'accept with complete confidence what he says to you, *as if it came*

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[11] Neither Symeon the New Theologian nor his biographer mention the term σάλος (holy fool) in connection with Eulabes, although his behaviour could suggest that interpretation. See Morris (1993) 62.

[12] (1972) 233.

[13] PG 26, 929B.

[14] (1997) 24–26.

[15] Ed (2001) 36.

[16] *Asc* 8, 4–6, SC 460, 80 = *Text* 123, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 52.

[17] *Asc* 24, 12, SC 460, 102 = *Text* 144, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 59.

[18] *Asc* 19, 5–6, SC 460, 88–90 = *Text* 139, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 55–56.

[19] *Asc* 9, 9–11, SC 460, 80–82 = *Text* 124, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 53; *Asc* 23, 16–17, SC 460, 100 = Text 143, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 58; *Asc* 11, 6–9, SC 460, 84 = *Text* 126, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 53; *Asc* 30, 6–10, SC 460, 108 = *Text* 150, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 61.

from the mouth of God.'[20] (my italics). Symeon the Younger describes the holiness of the Spiritual father as being akin to that of Moses, being on ground hallowed by the presence of God.[21] He is also explicit about the mentor's imitation of Christ as a compelling reason for obedience, stating that:

> When a man has gained a vivid faith in his father under God, whenever he looks at him he thinks he is looking at Christ himself. When he is with this father or following him, he firmly believes that he is with Christ and following him.[22]

As mentioned earlier, when Symeon has his first vision of uncreated light, what he in fact sees is his spiritual father in the presence of God. He describes how 'the young man' was praying the Jesus prayer when:

> suddenly a flood of divine radiance appeared from above and filled all the room . . . he was wholly in the presence of immaterial light and seemed to himself to have turned into light. Oblivious of all the world he was filled with tears and with ineffable joy and gladness. His mind then ascended to heaven and beheld yet another light.[23]

For Symeon, who is obviously 'the young man', the authority of his Spiritual Father is ratified by this luminous event, and the power of the pneumatic chain between Father and child is identified with light and the vision of heaven. Visions of divine light become associated for Symeon with the presence of God, as experienced by Eulabes who reported 'divine illuminations sent from heaven to those engaged in the spiritual struggle, consisting in a flood of light, and conversations between God and man thereby'.[24] In observing that 'he marvelled at it', Symeon also perhaps expressed an expectation that he, too, may experience such visions of light.

The attribution of loyalty to one's 'father' as to Christ is a requirement at every level of monastic encounter: the spiritual elder's submission to the Abbot is in imitation of Christ's obedience.[25] Symeon

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[20] *Asc* 6, 3–4, SC 460, 78, = *Text* 122, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 51, cf. Symeon *Ch* 1, 25, SC 51, 47, trans McGuckin (1982) 39 'If you have a pure faith you will abide by the decision of your spiritual father as if everything were in the hands of God.'

[21] *Ch* 1, 30, SC 51, 48, trans McGuckin (1982) 41.

[22] *Ch* 1, 28, SC 51, 47, trans McGuckin (1982) 40, and cf. *Ch* 1, 55, SC 51, 55, trans McGuckin (1982) 47.

[23] *Cat* 22, 4, 88ff., SC104, 372, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 245ff.

[24] *Cat* 16, 1, 1ff., SC 104, 236ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 198.

[25] *Asc* 3, 2–3, SC 460, 74 = *Text* 129, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 53–4 and cf. *Text* 138, ibid. 55.

himself stresses the need for a higumen to conform to the same standards he expects of his monks.[26] The young monk, in conforming to his elder's role model and performing the tasks he is allotted, is acting 'in imitation of Christ, and in accordance with our Lord's commandment . . . to endure manfully':[27] like Christ, the human disciple must carry that obedience to the point of death, if only a metaphorical death of sin and self.

This insistence on obedience lays the foundation for the rest of the Studite's teaching, and the Studite's pupil likewise sees obedience as the pre-requisite for spiritual learning.[28] This ensured that any true disciple would transmit this message to further generations, as Symeon himself does, saying 'You are a child of obedience . . . make me worthy to fall in tears at the feet of my holy father'.[29] He spells out what this obedience means: you should eat, drink, sleep and pray only when and as your spiritual father directs you;[30] to ignore or contradict your father plays into the hands of the devil.[31] Such loyal following of a respected individual within the community was not intended to undermine the monastic structure, indeed, it was the essence of the pedagogical pattern employed in the Studium: this is reflected in Symeon's own *Catechesis 1*, 28–38.[32] Symeon's interpretation of this convention, however, seems to have been unusually focused, and Krausmuller claims that it 'attempted to limit radically the choice of models to one person who then taught all necessary spiritual knowledge'.[33] When Symeon refers to his spiritual father as 'one who was equal to the great and exalted saints' or one who 'had already cast human weakness aside and become an angel instead of a man,'[34] he is being neither innovative nor derogatory of wider church structures; he was articulating an existing tradition, one of which he was

[26] *Ch* 1, 80, SC 51, 64, trans McGuckin (1982) 56.
[27] *Asc* 21, 12–14, SC 460, 96 = *Text* 141, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 57.
[28] *Ch* 1, 61, SC 51, 56, trans McGuckin (1982) 48–9, where he talks of 'the rock of obedience to their spiritual father'.
[29] *Ch* 1, 60, SC 51, 56, trans McGuckin (1982) 48.
[30] *Ch* 1, 24–6, SC 51, 46–7, trans McGuckin (1982) 39.
[31] *Ch* 1, 59, 60, 62, SC 51, 55–57, trans McGuckin (1982) 48/9.
[32] SC 96, p. 226, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 41–2.
[33] Krausmuller (1994) 75. Krausmuller explores the practice of personal friendships in monastic communities through an examination of those at Studios and St. Mamas at the end of the tenth century.
[34] *Cat* 16, 9–10 and 151–2, SC 104, 236–238 and 250, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 198 and 202, cf. *Ch* 1, 85, SC 51, p. 66, trans McGuckin (1982) 58 and *Ch* 3, 85–7, SC 51, 107–8, trans McGuckin (1982) 98.

part, and to which he contributed. Ware, exploring the tension between tradition and personal experience, notes that 'For St. Symeon, the decisive criterion is whether or not a man possesses direct experience of the Holy Spirit'.[35] In other words, if someone's ideas diverge from previous practice but are empowered by divine knowledge, these ideas become an authentic part of the tradition.

McGuckin sees in this aspect of Symeon's transmission of the Studite tradition a perspective which 'celebrates the priority of the personal over the institutional: a fundamental ordering of verities which Christianity has ever neglected to its peril'.[36] This 'personal' element is not an antinomian or egotistical usurpation of tradition: it is rooted in Symeon the New Theologian's experience of God's indwelling spirit. As Izard says, Symeon's experience is 'not simply *ecclesial* but also and above all an existential experience of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the world', which for Izard is not a contradiction in terms.[37]

Consciousness of the Spirit through obedience to an enlightened teacher provides the basis for the idea of a 'golden chain of living saints',[38] something also described as one lamp lighting another. Theologically speaking, this means that participation in the Godhead is passed from one generation to another; the willingness of a disciple in any age to recognize the true holiness of a fellow Christian, and to have the humility to place himself under his authority, graciously confers adopted sonship of God. Because of the power afforded by such a relationship, a spiritual father should be identified as 'one who himself has had a spiritual birth, who consciously knows his God and Father'.[39]

Symeon is aware that his own obedience and love for Eulabes was instrumental in effecting his advancement: in *Catechesis 22*, he states that

> I think that it was on account of this that God, who loves men, through his prayers showed mercy on me after so many years . . . By His providence He has caused me to become a monk at the hand of that saintly old man, and has granted me, who am truly unworthy, to stay with him always.[40]

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[35] (1972) 135.
[36] (1997) 89.
[37] (1990) 96.
[38] *Ch* 3, 4, SC 51, 81, trans McGuckin (1982) 72–3.
[39] *Epistle* 4, ll. 158–61, cited and trans in Krivocheine (1986) 87.
[40] *Cat* 22, 299ff., SC 104, 388, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 251 and 310ff., SC 51, 388, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 252.

Ware describes the situation with Eulabes as being a participation in the 'inward and hidden 'apostolic succession' of spiritual men'.[41] There is a Biblical precedent for such 'succession': in Pauline terms, it is a living of life according to the spirit not the letter of the law, a *modus vivendi* which subjugates the structure of the Church to its vital contents. In *Catechesis 32*,[42] Symeon urges submission to the living witness of the Holy Spirit because, he argues, the Spirit of God is present in living saints such as Eulabes. He therefore urges his reader to:

> imitate the repentance of David and of the rest of the saints. Display a worthy penitence by means of all sorts of deeds and words, that you may draw on yourselves the grace of the all-holy Spirit. For this Spirit, when He descends on you, becomes like a pool of light to you . . . We have known such a man in our own time, our holy father the Studite.[43]

In *Catecheses 4*[44] and *6* he repeats this message, stressing that Eulabes was 'moved by the Spirit of God'.[45]

Symeon's evident devotion to his namesake proved problematic, and Nicetas emphasises the part played in his trial by his 'cult' of Eulabes. Certainly, the institution of Kontakia in Eulabes' honour, and the presence of icons without consultation with the Patriarch provided Stephen of Nicomedia with ammunition, but the issue was as much symbolic of an existing conflict as the source of it, as Hausherr and McGuckin point out.[46] The mere presence of an *akolouthia* was not remarkable: it did not always comment on the extent to which a new 'saint' was formally canonized. Krivocheine gives basic details of the cult.[47] But what is significant here is that Symeon is guided by his obedience to and faith in Eulabes with regard to certain key aspects of the elder's teaching, which become the bedrock for his own theology. One of these is the often quoted 'Brother, never communicate without tears',[48] which, in *Catechesis 4*, Symeon attributes to Eulabes' influence. It is important to look at this in more detail, but first it is essential to gain some understanding of another Studite tradition which brought Symeon into controversy with the ecclesiastical

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[41] (1972) 229.
[42] SC 113, 77ff., p. 238, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 335.
[43] *Cat* 32, 4ff., SC 113, 244, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 337.
[44] SC 104 (1964) 28, 123.
[45] SC 96 (1963) 314, 70.
[46] McGuckin (1982) 17.
[47] See Krivocheine (1986) 33, 49ff., 62.
[48] *Cat* 4, 11ff., SC96, 314, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 70.

authorities, namely the necessity for daily confession, and the standing of the confessor.

For Eulabes, monastic obedience is characterised by the practice of daily confession or sharing of thoughts, which he describes as a process of self-examination (*exagouresis*), followed by confession to one's father.[49] Symeon describes this in *Hymn 4*:

> Listen only to the admonitions of your father,
> give to him humble answers,
> and tell him your thoughts as to God.[50]

Eulabes sees this practice, which was widely adopted in the Studium, as firmly rooted in Biblical tradition (Matt. 3.6)[51] and the fear of God.[52] His pupil clearly placed great store on this discipline, and his *Epistle One*, newly translated from Holl's edition,[53] is the major source for his reinterpretation of this: it has provided a hunting ground for those who would seek to read Symeon's teachings as being critical of ecclesial structures. But, as so often with Symeon, the important issue is that of the validating of the authority behind the sacramental and social aspects of absolution and *exagouresis*. Symeon insists on the golden chain of spiritual charism as the sole criterion for authority. This may coincide with holy orders, indeed Symeon is clear that this was the case originally,[54] but when the holiness of the ordained priest fails, the sacred trust is transmitted further down the line, to monks and ultimately to any lay person who is still spiritually awakened and pure. This chain of charism is a literal enlightening: Symeon uses the image of one lamp lighting another, a lamp which both lights up the way for the spiritual traveller in a physical sense, and also has the metaphysical meaning of demonstrating 'the intelligible light'.[55] For him, his elder was a living saint, who 'shone like the sun',[56] and whose place as a link in the chain is stressed by comparison to the deeds and examples of Antony of Egypt and Arsenius. Significantly, Symeon sees such charism as being demonstrated by a focus on tears

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[49] *Asc* 5 and 6, SC 460, 76–78 = *Texts* 121–122, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 51/2.
[50] 25–27, SC 156, 192, trans Griggs (1999).
[51] *Asc* 3, 9–10, SC 460, 74 = *Text* 129, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 54.
[52] *Asc* 5, 1 SC 460, 76 = *Text* 121, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 51.
[53] Golitzin (1997) 185ff.
[54] *Ep 1*, 11, Holl (1898) 119–120, trans Golitzin (1997) 196–7
[55] *Eth* 9, 261ff., SC 129, 238, trans Golitzin (1996) 119–21; *Eth* 14, l 93, SC 129, 428, trans Golitzin (1995) 175.
[56] *Cat* 6, 163ff., SC 104, 28, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 123.

of penitence. He recognises the continuance of the golden chain in his own person, knowing that he, too, has been purified and enlightened by tears which, like the lamp he talks of, are luminous with the uncreated light. So in order to appreciate how Symeon integrates his spiritual father's life and teachings into his own life, it is important to consider how he came to be attached to Eulabes, and then explore the issue of not receiving communion without weeping, and the luminosity of spiritual tears.

Symeon adopts the pattern of spiritual fatherhood as a role model for his own teaching, whether in his behaviour as Abbot, or in the writings which articulate this discipline. He acknowledges the need for a wise example to follow, following Eulabes' advice to 'implore God with prayers and tears to send you a guide who is dispassionate and holy'.[57] He acknowledges the role of discernment (*diakrisis*) in perceiving the authenticity of a spiritual guide; this must be combined with a thorough knowledge of Biblical teachings which act as a gloss to the teachings of the father, so that the disciple may weed out any thinking divergent to the Biblical tradition.

Symeon, as a link in the golden chain, passes on the benefit of his experience to others. In Eulabes he found his own spiritual Moses,[58] whose life witnessed to his leadership: in *Catechesis 10*, obviously composed for the feast day of Eulabes, he affirms that:

> All the saints confirm this witness through their own lives, among others our blessed father Symeon the Studite himself, whose memory we celebrate today . . . he surpassed not only those who shone in his own generation, but even many of the fathers of old, in the sublimity of his virtues and by achievements beyond [human] power. Therefore, since he has shown himself to us to be worthy of many praisies and eulogies, we praise him, call him blessed, and eulogize him according to our ability.[59]

This text was obviously composed for a monastic audience, however, Symeon taught that lay people as well as monastics need spiritual directors, and *Epistle Three* urges his reader to 'Secure a father, acquire a teacher, find an ambassador, a guarantor before God'.[60] *Epistle One* asserts the need for:

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[57] *153 Texts: 33*, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 30, cf. *Ch* 1, 49, SC 51, 52, trans McGuckin (1982) 45.
[58] *Hymn 18*, 136ff., SC 174, 86, trans Griggs (1999).
[59] *Cat* 10, 36ff., SC 104, 140, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 163.
[60] *Epistle* 3, tr. Krivocheine (1986) 97.

> an intercessor and friend of God, someone capable of restoring him to his former state and reconciling him to God the Father . . . an intercessor, physician, and a good counsellor . . . that he may propose ways of repentance which agree with good advice.[61]

One of the specific 'ways of repentance' recommended by Eulabes is that no-one should go to the altar without tears. Symeon the Younger acknowledges this as the most significant of 'his many extraordinary practices . . . which he observed without fail throughout his life and in teaching and writing summed up as follows: "Brothers, never communicate without tears"'.[62] Much of this repeats classical desert monasticism, filtered through the particular tradition of the Studium. Symeon devotes a considerable part of *Catechesis 4* to this issue, although it does not dominate his other writings. What is significant, however, is that this issue was seized on by those anxious to portray the Studite and his pupil as dangerous to the ecclesial status quo. The real controversy in this teaching is not, as already noted, in a Messalian approach to the sacrament. Rather it lies in the power and authority which is accorded to spiritual grief, which is portrayed as a process of purification and illumination which brings the weeper into the presence of God. This will emerge as a dominant theme in Symeon's own writings.

Eulabes' Teaching on Penitent Grief

Eulabes' writings emphasize that penitent tears act as a corrective to any arrogance about being 'a good penitent': continual tears[63] and recollection of sinfulness are gracious gifts which are conducive to a deeper sense of unworthiness and spiritual joy.[64] Writing for a monastic community, Eulabes sees penitent tears as having not just an individual benefit, but also a corporate context. Grieving penitence is seen as being other-oriented,[65] a sharing of mutual burdens of sin and weakness, and so the Studite states that weeping is a sign of love and

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[61] 5 and 7, Holl (1898) 114–5 and 117, trans Golitzin (1997) 191 and 193.
[62] *Asc* 24, 12, SC 460, 102 = *Text* 144, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 59, cf. *Cat* 4, 5ff., SC 96, 324, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 70.
[63] *Asc* 16, 3, SC 460, 86 = *Text* 136, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 55.
[64] *Asc* 20, SC 460, 90–95 = *Text* 140, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 56–7.
[65] *Asc* 23, SC 460, 98–103 = *Text* 143, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 58, and *Text* 151, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 61.

perfect compassion for one's fellow monks. The monk's spiritual condition is not merely a matter of personal perfection or self-indulgence: it impacts on his immediate and wider community. Once again, Eulabes' teaching demonstrates the model of discipleship established by Christ: penitent weeping is a practical sharing of one another's burdens, a means of living out of the 'new commandment'. It provides opportunities to give a less experienced monk a model of communal support and love:

> if a brother comes and asks you about carnal warfare, do not turn him away. But with compunction help him . . . When he has gone, stand up, recall his struggle and, lifting your hands with tears towards God, pray with all your heart for your brother.[66]

The other-orientedness of compunction is attested also by Eulabes' advice that not only should one not receive communion without weeping, but a monk must not go to the altar unreconciled to his brother.[67] So within the monastery, *penthos* has a cohesive as well as a purifying force.

The purification[68] and illumination[69] effected by tears are well documented in the monastic tradition, both that of the desert fathers and the Syrians. Eulabes stresses that the purification achieved by weeping both opens up a channel for divine visitation, and indicates that such an event has taken place. Like Isaac, Eulabes asserts the primacy of sincere tears over an unfocused prayer life which conforms to the set requirements of the community: heartfelt brief prayer, full of compunction, has more weight than long, empty recitation of offices.[70] In humility and sincerity, the monk should be unabashed about the outward expression of feelings of penitence, Eulabes says, as he urges his pupils to prioritise tears over physical presence in the divine office:

> when you are in church thinking about these things, weep bitter tears of compunction, taking no account of those who will be shocked by

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[66] *Asc* 31, 1–5, SC 460, 110 = *Text* 151, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 61.
[67] *Asc* 12, SC 460, 84 = *Text* 132, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 54.
[68] *Asc* 11, 6–8, SC 460, 84 = *Text* 126, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 53 cf. *Text* 152, ibid., 61–2.
[69] 'Where there is compunction and spiritual grief, there is also divine illumination,' *Asc* 9, 9–12, SC 460, 82 = *Text* 124, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 53, cf. *Asc* 20, 42–48, SC 460, 94 = *Text* 140, ibid., 56–7, and *Asc* 32, 17–22, SC 460, 112 = *Text* 152, Philokalia vol. 4, 61–2.
[70] *Asc* 9, 7–9, SC 460, 82 = *Text* 124, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 53.

> this . . . But if you see that as a result of this you are slipping into self-esteem, leave the church and weep in secret.[71]

Although this apparent individualism could be read as an undermining of ecclesial authority, it should be remembered that this teaching was an intrinsic aspect of various manifestations of the Eastern Christian tradition, especially that expounded by Isaac the Syrian. Eulabes stresses that it is humility and purity of the heart which are pleasing to God, and not the outward manifestation of holy thoughts and desires.[72]

So it is now possible to sum up the key aspects of the relationship between Symeon Eulabes and his pupil. Symeon's own writings present his youth as being an erratic period, in which political expediency and his own choice cut him off from both biological and surrogate parents. Urged not to abandon his father, Symeon 'preferred his heavenly father to his earthly father',[73] and, besieged by temptations, 'ran to rest only in the spiritual arms of his father in God'.[74] His desire for, and choice of, a spiritual father was not only in order to fill a vacuum in his family life, but also specifically to nurture his spiritual growth. *Catechesis 22* presents the meetings with the elder pseudonymously. It takes two separate encounters with the Studite, separated by a period of considerable debauchery,[75] before Symeon irrevocably accepts the authority of Eulabes. This is significant, because it resonates with Symeon's insistence that the baptism of tears is a second chance of purification after infant baptism. By analogy, the young man was an emotional and spiritual infant, having received only an innate baptism, until the point that he experiences the second, corroborative ecstatic experience. In spiritual adulthood, as it were, he thus melds a theological insight with his own experience, the *theoria* and *praxis* sustaining each other in a theological truth, and this is accompanied by tears:

> when a man suddenly lifts his eyes and contemplates the nature of reality in a way he has never done before, then he trembles and tears flood out spontaneously though he feels no sorrow. They purify him and wash him in a second baptism, the baptism Our Lord speaks about in the Gospels.[76]

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[71] *Asc* 8, 4–6, SC 460, 80 = *Text* 123, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 52.
[72] Symeon cites the wisdom of 'the saint' in *Cat* 16, 55–58, SC 104, 242, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 199–200.
[73] *Life*, 8, 16.
[74] *Life*, 16, 25.
[75] *Cat* 22, 289–91, SC 104, 388, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 251.
[76] *Ch* 1, 35, SC 51, 49, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 42.

In texts such as *Catechesis 4*, Symeon refers openly to the guidance he received at the hands of his spiritual father. He expresses his need for 'a mediator and ambassador',[77] and recognizes the luminosity of the right spiritual guide, saying that 'The man whose soul's lamp is still in darkness, that is, untouched by the divine fire, stands the more in need of a guide with a shining torch, who will discern his actions'.[78]

So, Symeon's life provides a framework of spiritual fatherhood which is both axiomatic of the Byzantine monastic tradition and in some ways a challenge to it. His adherence to his spiritual father and his own experience prompt him to base his teachings on the primacy of penthos in the spiritual life, and his reappropriation and development of this desert wisdom impacted on not only his own monastic career but the ecclesiastical status quo. Having examined Symeon's context it is now possible to place his teachings within the monastic and social framework of the time, and consider the theological implications of his writings and behaviour.

[77] *Cat* 35, SC 113, 305, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 361.
[78] *Cat* 33, 17–20, SC113, 250, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 339.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SYMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN AND *PENTHOS*

In assessing Symeon's teachings, a legacy from Eulabes becomes apparent, both with regard to the issue of penitent tears, and how this is framed by Symeon's own experience of weeping. At one level, there is merely the reiteration of an existing tradition. For Symeon, as for Klimakos, sorrow for sin is allied to fear of retribution at the day of judgement.[1] Like the prodigal son, the sinner's turning to God in repentance effects his restoration.[2] Symeon mentions the classic varieties of tears: they may be bitter,[3] or conversely 'not painful tears of suffering, but such as were sweeter than honey'.[4] Because they derive from 'the action and grace of the Holy Ghost, they were shed from their eyes without pain and without sound'.[5] Apparently, such tears are sometimes shed by adults at the moment of baptism.[6] Other tears might be painless.[7] Symeon shares the desert fathers' belief that tears are closely connected to humility[8] and purification, a cleansing which is gradual and thorough, with the penitential tears eventually moistening the whole body so that the person is:

> baptized entire, little by little, by the divine fire and Spirit, and becomes wholly purified, altogether immaculate, a son of the light and of the day, and from that point on no longer a child of mortal man.[9]

The cleansing power of tears leads penitents 'as sons of the light to ascend to the light which is above'.[10] Penitent tears are not selfpitying,

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[1] *Ch* 3, 16–21 and 23, SC 51, 84ff., trans McGuckin (1982) 67–68.
[2] *Eth* 10, 235ff., SC 129, 276ff., trans Golitzin (1995) 150.
[3] *Cat 4*, 164–5, SC 96, 328, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 74, and line 672, trans de Cantazaro (1980) SC 96, 368, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 87.
[4] See Alfeyev (2000) 209–215 on this point.
[5] *Cat* 29, 196–200, SC 113, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 313.
[6] *Cat* 17, l 39, SC 104, 256, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 205.
[7] *Cat* 9, line 97, SC 104, 112, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 146.
[8] *Ch* 1, 32, SC 51, p. 49, trans McGuckin (1982) 41, and *Ch* 3, 7–13, SC 51, 82ff., trans McGuckin (1982) 74–5, *Ch* 3, 30, SC 51, 89, trans McGuckin (1982) 80.
[9] *Eth* 3, 655ff., SC 122, 436, trans Golitzin (1995) 138, cf. *Eth* 10, 114ff., SC 129, 266, trans Golitzin (1995) 146; Cf. also *Ch* 3, 39, SC51, 91, trans McGuckin (1982) 82.
[10] *Eth* 4, 824ff., SC 129, 66, trans Golitzin (1996) p. 38.

or angry, but sorrowful, and attachment to inappropriate things may 'transform godly tears into their opposite'.[11] It is only godly tears which will have the purifying and enlightening effect desired by those seeking spiritual perfection; also, as the psalmist says, joy will grow out of sadness.[12] Symeon talks of this, for example, in *Chapter 1*, 77.[13] Like others within the early Christian tradition, Symeon asserts that anyone has the potential to weep out of mourning for lost innocence; it is not the preserve of a spiritual hierarchy, but normative within the monastic setting. Tears are the chief proof of the genuineness of repentance and it is 'in these and by these that the zealous man gains the purification of his soul and the knowledge of the mysteries of God'.[14]

Unlike Klimakos and Isaac, Symeon does not offer proof texts defining the nature or origin of tears. When his writings focus on weeping, as many do,[15] his concern is rather to explore the soteriological and ecclesial framework in which penitent tears operate. For Symeon, *penthos* informs and illuminates all aspects of Christian life: its presence offers a challenge to other, established indications of ecclesial authority. It is the spiritual authority behind the sacraments, it accompanies the process of spiritual and psychological growth. In anthropological terms, Symeon evidently sees mourning for sin in a holistically incarnate framework: the body is an important medium for expressing penitence and longing to be restored to the Godhead whose Incarnate form shared the flesh of common humanity. Symeon's emphasis on visions of the uncreated light also connects physical experiences with their spiritual counterparts.

Another aspect of Symeon's 'theology of tears'—and the term 'theology' must be read in its authentic sense of the experiential—is his belief that physical tears of grief at sin are not only a gift of the Holy Spirit, but a demonstration of the presence of the Spirit in those who weep. Tears therefore have a divine aspect as the power of the Spirit seeps into the one who weeps. The second baptism of tears constitutes the movement of the Spirit in the heart of the human person, a conscious ratification of the previously indwelling Grace of God. Whilst the baptism of tears is fundamental to Symeon's teaching, so

[11] *Cat* 7, line 416, SC 104, 80, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 141.
[12] Psalm 126.5, and Psalm 30.11.
[13] SC 51, 62ff., trans McGuckin (1982) 54.
[14] *Theo* 1, SC 122, p. 118, trans McGuckin (1982) 117.
[15] See particularly *Catecheses* 2, 4, 5, 23.

also is the issue of another sacrament, that of the Eucharist. The focus in Symeon's writings on the sacramentality of penitent grief is significant, since it goes some way to refute subsequent concerns about Messalianism, and affords his strongest defence against the accusations of the ecclesiastical establishment in his own day. However, the rationale for exploring these issues is not to defend Symeon against long-dead accusers, but because they are his own focus, and therefore tell us what he believed in. So in order to explore what he says about weeping, it is important to focus on the themes which recur throughout his writings.

The first theme pertinent to this study is ostensibly a development of the concept of tears as a form of baptism. Specifically, Symeon sees tears of grief for sin as restoring the image of God in fallen humanity. For Symeon, mourning for sin is a conscious act, hence the assertion that anyone can choose to do it. Just as sinning is a deliberate decision, so to repent of sin is a matter of personal responsibility, as well as of grace. The exercise of free will means that the 'old Adam' cannot be blamed for post-Baptismal sins: each individual must accept responsibility for them, and 'exhibit worthy penitence' in order to be reconciled to God.[16] The sinner must take the initiative in seeking forgiveness, like the sinful woman who bathes Jesus' feet with her tears, the prodigal son, and the woman with the haemorrhage, all of whom appear in Symeon's writings as examples of the correct approach.[17] As he says in *Catechesis 4*, 'it is by the free choice of the will that every person either obtains compunction and humility, or else becomes hardhearted and proud'.[18] Like Isaac, who contrasts the infant's innate humility to the adult's acquired humility,[19] Symeon states that 'it is not, as some think, by nature but by will that every man becomes either humble and apt for compunction, or hard-hearted, and insensitive.[20] Because it is axiomatic of human nature to possess free will, it is pointless to complain that one is not disposed to compunction and sorrow for sin.

Tears of grief are the daily bread, a normal bodily function, which he compares to another bodily fluid which his monks might rather ignore: Symeon compares the flow of tears with the emission of

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[16] *Cat* 5, 468–470, SC 96, 414, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 100–101.
[17] *Eth* 2, 1, SC 122, 316, trans Golitzin (1995) 85.
[18] *Cat* 4, 93–106, SC 96, 322ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 72.
[19] *Second Part*, XVIII, 7–9, trans Brock (1995) 67–9.
[20] *Cat* 4, 127–129, SC 96, 324ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 73.

semen. Neither, he asserts, are intrinsically bad or good: their value or meaning depends on how and why they flow:

> Of the two fluids that the body by nature produced in us—that is, the tears that flow sown from above and that which flows from the genitals—the latter defiles the soul *when it is evacuated contrary to nature and to law*, while the former, *when they flow out of penitence*, cleanse it.[21] (my italics)

In other words, semen which is produced for a 'lawful' purpose (presumably only reproduction) is unharmful, as is the emission 'by nature'(presumably while asleep): neither need any excuse. Symeon seems to be following the reassurance given by Eulabes that involuntary emission of semen may occur because of one's fear that such a thing might happen.[22] Whilst the body may have uncontrollable urges and involuntary moments, some aspects may be more controllable; the motivation for actions needs to be scrutinised. Tears which are not 'sown from above', which arise out of rage or frustration or self-pity, will not have the purifying power of penitent tears. In writing about these matters, Symeon reveals his idiosyncratic understanding of the role of the body in human life; his ability to distinguish between its proper and its inappropriate use shows affiliation perhaps to Platonic and Aristotelian concepts of human anthropology, rather than their Stoic counterpart. The anthropological basis to his work is devoid of much of the dualism that lies so close beneath the surface in Isaac, and less obviously ambivalent than Klimakos.

The fact that penitent tears are supposed to be the daily bread of monastic life[23] does not diminish their significance, because like physical bread, they sustain life, the life of the soul, and this is so necessary that 'that he who does not daily weep—I hesitate to say every hour, for fear of seeming to exaggerate—will destroy his soul and cause it to perish from hunger'.[24]

This injunction to daily or hourly tears seems an ambitious call, until one remembers the context in which the *Catecheses* were written:

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[21] *Cat* 9, ll. 355–60, SC 104, 132, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 159–60. This may be compared to *Cat* 24, 100–106, SC 113, 42, 209–210 where Symeon states that the fact of Eve being a naked female was not what inflamed Adam's lust, it was the introduction of disobedience which caused the problem. This discourse gives much interesting evidence of Symeon's understanding of the unity of body, soul and mind, and how their disparate needs and demands may be steered by a life lived continually in strict discipline.

[22] *Asc* 41, SC 460, 128–130 = *Text* 119, *Philokalia* vol. 4, 50–1.

[23] Ps 42.3, Ps 80.5.

[24] *Cat* 29, lines 229–233, SC 113, 184, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 314.

this is not advice directed to laity, but to monks living in obedience to their spiritual father, having renounced the world. If the *Vita* is to be trusted, both the monks and their Abbot were more than commonly in need of exhortation. Symeon assumes—or hopes—that his monks will personally experience a sense of being restored, through weeping. This emphasis on the individual's realisation of the indwelling of God is fundamental to Symeon's understanding of salvation. It is a consciousness which must supercede ratiocination, and which involves, as it were, not *sarx* but *soma*: if one 'cannot feel intuitively that he has put on the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, man and God, over his rational and intellectual nature' then one remains 'but flesh and blood'. Reason alone cannot give 'experience of spiritual glory . . . just as men who are blind from birth cannot know sunlight by reason alone'.[25]

Symeon's intuitive knowledge of God, which a modern person might term experience, must, he argues, be rooted in the soul but 'in a manner intelligible to the senses, which it can feel', otherwise 'the hope of salvation is rendered futile'. The body, as well as having carnal urges and involuntary behaviour, is also consciously the locus for the gift of the Spirit. The human body is clothed in God, an image Symeon shares with St Paul and Ephrem, for whom this is a major symbol. Symeon thus suggests that involuntary actions can be focused by the action of free will. This process entails not only a monastic 'guarding of the heart', and the purification of the soul through ascesis and self-denial, but also the shedding of tears, in which a spontaneous physical process may, *if happening in conjunction with spiritual enlightenment*, be a conscious expression of union with God.

In order to emphasise the importance of the physical, and perhaps following on from the suggestion of generation implied by the right and wrong use of semen, Symeon develops the image of gestation and certain aspects of childbirth as being images of the indwelling Spirit nurturing a godly inner life within. Not only, he argues, are tears a normative experience for those engaged in religious life, they are actually proof of life, just as it is only when a newborn infant cries that it is deemed alive. The weeping of the newborn infant 'shows thereby that human nature has mourning and tears as a concomitant from birth'.[26] As for the human infant, so for the Christian

[25] *Ch* 1, 53, SC 51, 54, trans McGuckin (1982) 47; note also McGuckin's comment on page 21 of the same volume.

[26] *Cat* 29, 238 and 215–217, SC113, 246ff., 266ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 314.

infant: the one mourns its separation from the womb that gave it life, the other weeps as it passes into the new life of the Spirit.[27] At Baptism, it is these tears which demonstrate that the new birth has taken place: he describes this in a touchingly vivid picture, in *Catechesis 8*:

> When a baby comes forth from its mother's womb it unconsciously feels the air and is spontaneously moved to weep and wail. So we must know that, when he who is "born from above" comes out from this world as from a dark womb, he enters into the intellectual and heavenly light, and as he, so to speak, peers slightly inside it he is at once filled with unspeakable joy. As he naturally thinks of [the darkness] from which he has been delivered, he painlessly sheds tears. This is how one begins to be counted among Christians.[28]

Symeon's predilection for images of light is obvious here. The darkness of the womb is contrasted to the brightness of the outside world, an experience so wonderful that when the vision of divine light ends, 'so severe was the pain and grief that overcame me that I am at a loss properly to describe how great it was'.[29] This resonates with Plato's image of the cave and the brightness outside it.

Symeon argues that the first baptism of water prefigures that of the Spirit which is acquired through a conscious desire for incorporation into Christ: in a similar way, 'the tears of birth are expressive of the tears of this life present here (on earth)'.[30] The presence of the Spirit is expressed by Symeon in terms of an uncreated luminosity: it descends like a 'pool of light to you, which encompasses you completely in an unutterable way', and its regenerating force 'changes you from corruptible to incorruptible, from mortal to immortal, from sons of men into Sons of God and gods by adoption'.[31]

As with his attitude of semen, so Symeon's use of images of gestation and childbirth show his ability to accept the body as not only a vehicle of spiritual growth, but as something acceptable in its own right—it has, like tears, a neutral basis, which is only corrupted by the action of the will. What he is concerned with is the consciousness of behaviour: inhibiting the natural flow through unawareness is dangerous. He expresses this vividly in a metaphor of birth:

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[27] *Cat* 29, 196–202, SC 113, 182, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 213.
[28] *Cat* 8, 90–98, SC 104, 92ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 145–6.
[29] *Cat* 16, 115–7, SC 113, 248, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 201.
[30] *Cat* 29, 228–9, SC 113, 184, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 314.
[31] *Cat* 32, 78–86, SC 113, 244, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 337.

> If a woman has conceived a child and does not deliver him into the world at the time appointed by nature, both she and her child will be in danger of death. In the same way, God has given our intelligence the natural property of constantly engendering speech, which is inseparable from it, and inherent in its very essence. If you suppress this, you also suppress that which engendered it.[32]

In other words, failing to communicate the spiritual life which is within frustrates and even imperils that life. Speech which is engendered by penitence takes the form of weeping: it is the body's mode of utterance. There is an integrity between the consciousness of intelligence and its outward expression; physical and spiritual actions are interdependent, as Symeon says, so 'that which flows from eyes, which are the object of senses, spiritually washes the soul of the mire of sins'. As the tears flow, they 'burn and crush the devils which set the soul free from the invisible bonds of sin'. Such tears 'flow from divine enlightenment and open heaven itself and assure me of divine consolation! . . . Where there is abundance of tears, brethren, accompanied by true knowledge, there also shines the divine Light'.[33]

This passage from *Catechesis 2* is distinctive in its mention of divine light. Symeon starts with a conventional eulogy to the purifying power of tears, and then moves to something more peculiarly his own, namely his emphasis on light imagery, which pervades much of his writings about the authenticity of spiritual experience.[34] Both his ecstatic visions, described in *Catecheses* 16 and 22, (for which he gives thanks in *Catecheses* 35 and 36, known as the *Eucharistia*),[35] are explicit that the vision of God is granted during a period of compunction accompanied by tears. A vision of light acts as the conduit to the presence of God:

> At once I was so greatly moved to tears and loving desire for God that I would be unable to describe in words the joy and delight I then felt. I fell prostrate on the ground, and at once I saw, and behold, a

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[32] *Ch* 2, SC 122, 142, trans McGuckin (1982) 128. See *Eth* 2, 7, 31ff., where Symeon describes how in paradise it was a man who gave birth to Eve, SC 122, 368ff., trans Golitzin (1995) 107 and 110–111.

[33] *Cat* 2, 262ff., SC 96, 262ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 54.

[34] See for example, *Cat* 8, 178ff., where Symeon states that the presence of the Holy Spirit 'shows us to be sons of light and sets our souls free from darkness'. SC 104, 100, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 148.

[35] *Euch* 1, 105ff., SC 113, p. 312, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 362, *Euch* 1, 218ff., SC 113, 346, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 374.

> great light was immaterially shining on me, and seized hold of my whole mind and soul.[36]

This light, which is the epiphany of the Holy Spirit, holds his whole person in suspended awareness of time and space. The vision of God granted through his tears takes the young man out of earthly bounds, similar to St. Paul's Damascus Road experience. It seems this vision of light was the one Symeon underwent when already a disciple of Eulabes. In *Catechesis 22*, however, he describes an event which took place when he was still living much more 'in the world'. In this encounter, the sequence of events is slightly different. He recounts how 'George', in other words himself, was standing in prayer, reciting mentally the Jesus prayer, when 'suddenly a flood of divine radiance appeared from above and filled all the room'.[37] The young man is rapt, 'in the presence of immaterial light', and weeps with joy. This experience may be seen as the key to Symeon's understanding of the place of tears within Christian life. While weeping, he ascends to heaven, and sees the guide whose own doctrine of weeping so compelled Symeon. Eulabes' own spiritual insights make him equal to the angels, and give weight to the teaching (in commandment and book) which he had passed on to Symeon the younger. The tears that he sheds on this occasion start from his own voicing of the penitent cry of the publican, and are accompanied by pure joy. In these visions, Symeon understands penitent tears as 'opening heaven', transcending time and space, and ratifying the holiness of his own spiritual father. Symeon affirms the apophatic nature of divine illumination as an authentic charism. A person who is endowed with such gracious power is illuminated thereby, 'and becomes like light'. Like Biblical prophets, they may see 'strange visions', but, unlike the prophet, cannot put the vision into words. Light becomes the dominant means of expressing this experience of God, both as understood by the person undergoing the visionary experience, and in terms of the effect he/she has on others: 'His mind is itself light and sees all things as light, and the light has life and imparts light to him who sees it'.[38]

For Symeon, the presence of the Holy Spirit—which is accompanied by tears of penitence—'gives new birth from above, and turns

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[36] *Cat* 16, 80ff., SC 104, 244, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 200.
[37] 89ff., SC 104, 372ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 245ff.
[38] *Cat* 2, 355ff., SC 96, 270, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 56, cf. *Cat* 14, 198ff., SC 104, 218, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 191.

us into sons of God'. Being clothed with Christ in this way, penitents become 'conscious partakers of eternal life' (note the stress on consciousness) and this is described in terms of light: the Spirit's presence 'kindles our lamp' and 'shows us to be sons of light and sets our souls free from darkness'.[39] Whilst these visions of light take place in an ecstatic manner, there is no doubt that he who underwent the experience was aware enough of what was happening to record it after the event. This consciousness of God's grace is, as already noted, an essential part of Symeon's teachings. For him, the most important indication of spiritual maturity and salvation is the awareness, in every aspect of human existence, of the indwelling of God. Such consciousness is eschatological: it is 'even here and now' that the penitent sinner can partake of eternal life.

Symeon's appropriation of the image of pregnancy and birth to explain the imperative of articulating the life of the spirit recurs: he also employs this very homely concept to explore the whole issue of the consciousness of God's indwelling spirit. In *Ethical Discourse 10*, he uses the idea of the pregnant woman's inability to ignore the movements of the baby in her womb to describe how spiritually aware people cannot be unconscious of the presence of God within them. In an extraordinarily rich amalgam of images, Symeon combines light mysticism, apophasis and gestation to make his point:

> the one who has Christ take form within himself and is aware of His stirring, which is to say His illuminations, is in no way ignorant of His leaps, that is His gleamings, and sees His formation within himself . . . [he] appears in a light which is personal and substantial; in a shape without shape, and a form without form He is seen invisibly and comprehended incomprehensibly.[40]

For Symeon, the prime way in which the penitent experiences this insistent awareness of God's presence is through weeping. Tears not only express grief, but through their humility and their function of integrating all parts of the human person, they peel away the layers of sin to reveal the God-like image in the pre-fallen state of humanity. But *penthos* for Symeon has wider implications than personal salvation, and so it is appropriate now to explore the issue of the authority he gives to penitent tears, and how this jostles with other hierarchies of power within the society of his time.

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[39] *Cat* 8, 176ff., SC 104, 100, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 148.
[40] *Eth* 10, l 882ff., SC 129, 322, trans Golitzin (1995) 169.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE AUTHORITY OF *PENTHOS* AND ITS SACRAMENTAL ROOTS

For Symeon, empirical experience of every aspect of the Christian life—including penthos—predetermines and constitutes authentic authority in spiritual matters: as he writes in *Catechesis 35*, 'He who has not recognized that change taking place in himself in accordance with the description in this discourse cannot possibly have the Holy Spirit dwelling within him'.[1] The apparent absence of the consciousness of the indwelling Holy Spirit forms the root of Symeon's criticism of Stephen of Nicomedia: the fact that Stephen comments inauthentically on theological matters is not just an insult to Symeon's beliefs that, but an offence to the Judge of all: if you haven't 'yet arrived yourselves at the perception and knowledge and experience of divine illumination and contemplation' then you should neither write nor debate such things 'without shuddering'.[2] Conversely, it is on the basis of such authentic knowledge of God that Symeon defends Eulabes: he was, according to Symeon, worthy of the 'cult' because he was a living saint, and was empowered to 'judge the affairs of his fellows for good or evil . . . only on the basis of his personal condition', in other words, the fact that Eulabes was someone who was 'inspired and moved by the Spirit, and . . . sees him intuitively and perceptibly'.[3]

While this authentication of spiritual authority may be conferred by various experiences, Symeon is particularly insistent that it is while weeping that divine epiphany takes place: when humility prompts tears 'you will find the presence of the holy and adorable Spirit' and 'When this [presence] arrives, all purity and holiness comes to the man it inspires. Then God appears to him and God looks on him'.[4] So if this divine revelation is essential, how many it be achieved? It has already been established that Symeon believes weeping is an innate

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[1] *Euch* 1, 265ff., SC 113, 326, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 367.
[2] *Eth* 1, 469ff., SC 122, 306ff., trans Golitzin (1995) 79.
[3] *Ch* 1, 85, SC 51, 66, trans McGuckin (1982) 58.
[4] *Ch* 3, 30, SC 51, 89, trans McGuckin (1982) 80.

and daily event, arising out of a grace-given awareness of the place of fallen humanity in God's creation. But monastic obedience and biblical teaching are also important in the acquisition of this state of mind. The monk's natural impulses as a man may be refined through the teaching and example of his spiritual father and other monks to a more focused sense of being reinvigorated by the Spirit. In exhortatory style, Symeon urges an adherence to monastic disciplines, so that:

> indeed something is opened up in us, like a little hole in the visible roof of the heavens and the light of the world above, immaterial and spiritual, peeks around it.[5]

In other words, lamenting for sin releases the potential for a vision of heaven, and in affording a glimpse of 'the world above', *penthos* opens a parallel world which is usually concealed, although ever present, in the same sense that Christ was eternally begotten, yet Incarnate only at a certain point in history. The authority which such experiences confers is, to Symeon's eyes, evident in such as Eulabes, but conspicuously absent in Stephen. In a vision of the world in which God's order prevails, Symeon therefore asserts that not only in the monastery, but also in the rest of the world, the power of such charismatic epiphanies is what counts, and not secular authority.

In Symeon's references to spiritual baptism we see most emphatically the delineation of his insistence on the *conscious* experience of the Holy Spirit. This is what he adds to a well-established tradition of weeping as a form of baptism. He yokes his own experience with the biblical advice to undergo spiritual as well as water baptism, stating that 'Our salvation is not by the baptism of water alone, but also by the Spirit'.[6] Previous exponents of baptism through weeping include John of Damascus, who lists penitential tears as the sixth form of baptism,[7] and, as already noted, both Klimakos and Isaac use the image. As well as reflecting the earlier patristic tradition, Symeon quotes the authority of Acts 8.14–17 to ratify his belief that the passive acceptance of Christ though baptism should not lead to complacency: he does not believe it to be an automatic process, but one which affects 'only those who are firm in the faith and have arrived

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[5] *Eth* 1, SC 122, 300ff., trans Golitzin (1995) 77.

[6] *Eth* 10, 188ff., SC 129, 272, trans Golitzin (1995) 148.

[7] *De Fide Orthodoxa*, Libra IV, IX, PG 120, 1124c (1864). There is a section in Panicker's article (1991) on the subject, but he does not add much to the details already recorded by Hausherr and Ross.

at perfect knowledge, or indeed have prepared themselves by a prior purification and thus come to Baptism'.[8] This prior purification is achieved through conscious repentance, as he states in *Hymn 55*:

> You have given repentance as a second purification,
> and You have set the grace of the Holy Spirit as the goal of repentance,
> the grace we first received in baptism.
> For you have said the grace is not only by water,
> but even more by the Spirit, in the invocation of the Trinity.[9]

What then did water baptism mean for Symeon? Baptism marks out the Christian as Christ's own. It is an essential preliminary to Christian discipleship, the sign and seal of what is corroborated through subsequent baptism in the spirit through tears. In language reminiscent of the Syrian tradition of typology,[10] Symeon explains:

> In the first baptism, water symbolizes tears and the oil of chrismation prefigures the inner annointing of the Spirit. But the second baptism is no longer a type of the truth, but the truth itself.[11]

Another echo of the Syrians is in his image of baptism as a pledge of betrothal,[12] the precursor to the permanent condition of marriage. Quoting again from *Hymn 55*, we can see Symeon's stress on the incompleteness of infant water baptism, which requires an adult act of will to effect lasting purity:

> Therefore since we have been baptised as children who were unaware,
> as unperfected persons we received the grace imperfectly,
> we received [only] the release from the first transgression.[13]

The marking as Christ's own is an indication that the penitent has become aware of the need to be cleansed from subsequent defilement through conscious repentance, as one promised to Christ.[14] In outlining the form such penitence should take, Symeon specifies the need to express it in tears:

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[8] *Eth* 10, 323ff., SC 129, 282, trans Golitzin (1995) 152.
[9] 33–37, SC 196, 254ff., trans Griggs (1999).
[10] For a discussion about typology in Symeon, see Alfeyev (2000) 44–5 and 48.
[11] *Ch* 1, 36, SC 51, 50, trans McGuckin (1982) 42.
[12] *Ch* 3, 47–53, SC 51, 94ff., trans McGuckin (1982) 85–87.
[13] 38–40, SC 196, 256, trans Griggs (1999).
[14] *Cat* 2, 130–152, SC 96, 252ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 50–51, cf. *Cat* 30, 133–140, SC 113 (1965) 204, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 321.

> . . . everyone mourn and weep with me,
> Like little ones receive God in Baptism,
> or better, like infants become children of God,
> because we sinners have been promptly cast out
> from the house of David.[15]

This advice is reiterated throughout Symeon's writings. Not only is it found in the ecstatic, personal hymns, and in the *Catecheses* preached to his monks, it is also stated clearly in *Chapter 3, 45*:

> We receive the remission of our sins at our divine baptism and we are freed from the ancient curse and sanctified by the presence of the Holy Spirit. But this is not yet that perfect grace of which the Scripture speaks: 'I shall dwell in them and walk therein.' (Cor. 6.16) This applies only to those who are strong in faith and show it in their works, for if we fall back into evil and shameful deeds after our baptism, we completely throw away this very sanctification. *It is in proportion to our repentance, confession, and tears that we receive the remission of our former sins, and as a consequence of this, sanctification and grace from on high.*[16] (my italics)

Baptism unaccompanied by faith and penitence will not effect salvation.[17] For Symeon, it is only those who have been born again in this manner who will feel the indwelling Spirit in themselves and also recognise it in others who have shared in this experience.[18] This is his authority for recognising Symeon Eulabes as a living saint, whose intercessions rescued his pupil from trangression.[19] He is confident that, far from his teaching on baptism being heretical, it is those who are unable to recognise the line of charismatic continuity from 'the Holy Fathers' who are in error.[20] Symeon does not seek to denigrate the first baptism, but to affirm the baptismal process effected through tears of penitence. Rather than questioning the validity or otherwise of the original baptism, he is concerned with stressing the penitential nature of the second, and the consciousness of it compared to infant baptism. Such a spiritual rebirth is a new insight for the one who undergoes it, and its authenticity is corroborated always for Symeon by biblical citation, as this passage illustrates:

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[15] *Hymn* 15, 252ff., SC 156, 298, trans Griggs, and see also *Cat* 30, 177ff., SC 113, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 322–323.
[16] *Ch* 3, 45, SC 51, 93, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 85.
[17] *Cat* 7, 164–169, SC 104, 60, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 134.
[18] *Cat* 24, 111–116, SC 113, 42, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 265.
[19] *Cat* 32, 74ff., SC 113, 244, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 337.
[20] *Cat* 29, 138–149, SC 113, 176ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 312.

> when a man suddenly lifts his eyes and contemplates the nature of reality in a way he has never done before, then he trembles and tears flood out spontaneously though he feels no sorrow. They purify him and wash him in a second baptism, that baptism Our Lord speaks about in the Gospels: 'If a man is not born of water and the Spirit, he will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven' and again he says: 'If he is not born from on high.' When he said 'from on high', he signified being born of the Spirit.[21]

Even the most fervent repentance and weeping confers no automatic benefit; the penitent must also 'receive the complete remission of our sins from our father and sponsor',[22] and here we can see clearly why the nature of the authority of the spiritual father is such an issue: he is the conduit for mercy and grace.

The first baptism in water is important, but only partial, because, Symeon argues, it is not a conscious acceptance of the Holy Spirit. The conscious nature of tears, indicating as they do a deeper level of awareness of God's work in the inner recesses of the heart, completes the rebirth in the Spirit, just as the tears of the newborn infant prove that it lives. The baptism of tears is also the antedote to post-baptismal sin:[23] effected through repentance and tears, it is the baptism 'from on high' and constitutes rebirth which secures entry into the Kingdom of Heaven,[24] Symeon confirms.[25]

So Symeon's teaching on baptism reveals a subtle reworking of his inheritance. Water baptism is necessary and appropriate for infants; a more complete state of purity and enlightenment is assured through conscious repentance, an epiclesis through weeping. Similarly, we see in Symeon's teachings on the eucharist both a conformity to existing eastern Christian teachings, and a new emphasis, marked most obviously by his injunction to never receive communion without weeping.

In Symeon's teaching on the baptism of tears, the emphasis on the participation of the Holy Spirit in the moulding of the Christian is highly evident. In his teachings on the eucharist, he writes specifically about weeping for sin effecting incorporation into the body of Christ,

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[21] *Ch* 1, 35, SC 51, 49, trans McGuckin (1982) 42.
[22] *Ch* 3, 46, SC 51, 93, trans McGuckin (1982) 85.
[23] *Cat* 29, 191ff., SC 113, 180ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 313, cf. *Cat* 30, 133ff., SC 113, 204ff.
[24] John 3.3, 5.
[25] *Cat* 32, 59ff., SC 113, 242, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 336–7, and see also the passage on the key to the Kingdom, in *Cat* 33, 108ff., SC 113, 256, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 342.

both by sharing in his sufferings[26] (an aspect Isaac writes copiously about) and also by being able to experience the daily Easter 'in those who know its mystery'.[27] Symeon is adamant that it is only when repentance and humility enable someone to share in Christ's sufferings that they may enter the Kingdom of Heaven.[28] When this contrition is expressed, then Christ restores the penitent who had been cast out of paradise: manifesting himself to those who were 'worthily humbling themselves by weeping and mourning.[29]

Penitence is the start of spiritual rebirth which is a sharing in Christ's resurrection: those who choose to leave the world and enter 'into the tomb of repentance and humiliation by being assimilated to the sufferings of the Lord' will find that the Lord descends 'and enters into our body as into a tomb'.[30] But sharing in Christ's resurrection does not mean a purely physical event, but rather, a 'spiritual regeneration and resurrection of the dead souls that takes place in a spiritual manner every day.[31] As with the command to weep every day, we have here another suggestion that spiritual regeneration is a continuous process, and one in which the whole person is involved. In the *Fourth Ethical Discourse*, Symeon uses the analogy of the human body, with its various parts bearing different roles, (cf. I Corinthians 12, on the diversity of gifts of the spirit) to describe the 'measure of spiritual maturity and the height of Christ's fullness'. The most intimate aspect of this is the place of weeping:

> The members and parts which one is obliged to hide are unceasing prayer of the mind, the sweetness which derives from the shedding of tears, the joy of the heart and its inexpressible consolation.[32]

The sufferings of Christ, and Christians' incorporation into his body, are most strongly enacted at the altar, and so here Symeon's teachings about never receiving communion without tears are pertinent. Symeon's insistence that you should never receive communion without weeping was challenged in his own day,[33] and has subsequently

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[26] *Cat* 8, 50ff., SC 104, 90, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 182
[27] *Cat* 13, 10ff., SC 104, 90, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 181.
[28] *Cat* 27, 268ff., SC 113, 118, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 291.
[29] *Cat* 5, 325ff., SC 96, 404, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 98.
[30] *Cat* 8, 50ff., SC 104, 90, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 182.
[31] *Cat* 6, 355ff., SC 104, 44, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 128–9.
[32] *Eth* 4, 375ff., SC 129, 34, trans Golitzin (1996) 24.
[33] *Cat* 4, 10–20, SC 96, 314–6, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 70.

been seen as setting too high a standard, a discipline which could only be achieved by an elite. *Hymn 3* mentions that 'there is one out of a thousand, or better out of ten thousand who has arrived at mystical contemplation'.[34] This injunction stems directly from the overt teaching of Eulabes, and Symeon himself consciously presents this issue as a continuance of the Studite's teaching. He thus justifies this injunction to his monks by reminding them that penitent grief at the point of communion demonstrates continuance of the only really important 'tradition', the transmission of the Holy Spirit from one generation to the next. In this context, to weep is to receive the Holy Spirit, (as we have seen with regard to baptism) and to be open to God's continuing mission through the gift of the Paraclete. Whether or not this is possible for most monks, or a reasonable expectation, is of secondary importance: Symeon does discuss this, but he seeks primarily to stress the need for mourning for sin, and affirms a reverent approach to the sacraments of God's Church, as with baptism.

He adds his own gloss to Eulabes' teaching, both in *Catechesis 4*, and in *Hymn 58*, where he writes as if in the person of Christ, horrified at the impurity of ecclesiastics who 'unworthily handle my Body' without themselves being purified by penitence and inspired by grace. Not only is this offensive to God, it renders the sacrament inert. As Golitzin explains, in his gloss to *Ethical Discourse 10*, 'Baptism and Eucharist will merely be water, bread, and wine for us if we remain unconscious of the Spirit Who is "ineffably mingled" with them'.[35]

As already stated, *Catechesis 4* suggests that the presence or absence of compunction is a matter of the conscious will.[36] Symeon does not claim that it is natural or easy for people to weep continuously, but it is possible, and he urges his monks to remember that if they hope to receive the charism of tears they must be disciplined in their practices, renouncing comforts and distractions which impede the flow of the Spirit in them. He is particularly adamant that outward appearances, such as regular but inattentive attendance at the Office of prayers,[37] are insufficient alone. For Symeon, daily weeping, or the desire and recognition of the need to weep, is possible for those who

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[34] Trans Maloney (1975) 253.
[35] 'Introduction' to *Eth* 10, trans Golitzin (1995) 142.
[36] *Cat* 4, l 65, 94ff., SC 96, 320, 322ff., trans de Cantazaro (1980) 127ff.
[37] *Cat* 4, 200ff., and 357ff., SC 96, 330, and 344, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 75 and 79.

repent daily, as they are urged to do by the Scriptures.[38] It is the continual and faithful repetition of ascetic discipline, of praxis, which brings about tears, and since all need to repent, all have the potential for tears. He quotes Eulabes' assertion that, he asserts that: 'no-one should communicate without tears, and that this is possible and truly suitable for all', and is quite clear that this is not Eulabes' own idea, but the Spirit speaking through him, when he urges that:

> Since no one is without sin, even if he lived but a single day, and no one is able to keep his heart pure, it is evident that a man must not spend one single day of all his life without penitence and tears, as far as he is able. *Even if he has not tears, at least he ought to seek them with all his power and soul.* In no other way can he become sinless, nor may his heart become pure.[39] (my italics)

In other words, as demonstrated elsewhere in Symeon's religious anthropology, it is the intention and desire that counts, as much as the actual external manifestation of weeping. It is also significant that Symeon stresses it was the Spirit moving in Eulabes which caused him to utter these words: this is proof that Eulabes is an example of a truly purified and illuminated person, a living saint whose purity of heart renders him a vehicle for God's work on earth. The emphasis is on the conscious orientation of the human will away from sin, a turning to the new life of the Spirit, which is demonstrated by a mournful heart. This emphasis on the human *potential* for grace throws some light on the apparent inconsistency of Symeon's teachings about the voluntary or involuntary nature of mourning for sin. To weep and mourn continually is the highest spiritual achievement, but to be moving towards that state, through daily renunciation, is also commendable. God's grace may grant to one particular person a greater propensity than another, but all may choose to actively lament sin. As fellow limbs of Christ's body, some will have a greater ability to weep than others, according to their nature, an acknowledgement of human diversity which Klimakos discusses. But Symeon is adamant that those who are not illumined in even the most tentative manner are not sanctioned to act as priests at the altar. As with the question of baptism, Symeon talks less about the nature or importance of the sacrament (which he sees as axiomatic to the life of the

[38] *Cat* 4, 493ff., SC 96, 354, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 83.
[39] *Cat* 4, 567ff., SC 96, 360, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 85.

Church), but focuses rather on the human interpretation of the mystery of Divine power revealed through true penitence. This therefore has ramifications for Symeon's take on ecclesiology.

It has already been mentioned that Symeon sees the true authority of the church as depending on direct, personal experiences of incorporation with God, and this would be demonstrated by purity, implicitly achieved by penitence and weeping. The charism of the living saint, who has seen the vision of God, remits sin and restores the penitent to the original untarnished image of God. All Adamic creation can be restored 'if we imitate his confession, his repentance, his mourning, his tears',[40] and Symeon cites references from Heb. 13.5, Mt. 12.49f., Mk. 3.34f., Lk. 8.21, Rom. 8.17, Jn. 12.28, Deut. 4.39 to corroborate his confidence that God will never abandon those who belong to him in this way. As with the issue of first and second baptism, Symeon is not seeking to undermine the ecclesial authorities, rather to assert the crucial part played in the life of the church by spirit-filled penitence and weeping. A key example of this is the issue of the binding and losing of sins, spelt out in *Epistle 1*, which notes that the power to remit sins has been granted:

> neither to those in the habit of monks, nor to those ordained and enrolled in the rank of priesthood, nor yet those who have been honoured with the dignity of the episcopate . . . Rather, this grace is given alone to those, as many as there are among priests and bishops and monks, who have been numbered with Christ's disciples on account of their purity of life.[41]

Symeon's focus is truly radical, in that he exposes the roots of the tradition, not the corrupted fruits. By returning to the Spirit's gift of penitent weeping as the source of holiness, Symeon suggests that not only the sacramental life of the church but salvation itself depends on repentance expressed through the body's expression of grief, as a conscious embodiment of the Holy Spirit. For Symeon, repentance of sins committed restores mankind to a state superior even to the first paradise, as perfect as the pre-fallen Adam. This state is open to seculars and monks, as the heirs of Adam and Eve, stated explicitly in *Catechesis 5*:

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[40] *Cat* 5, 365ff., SC 96, 406, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 99–100.

[41] Trans Golitzin (1997) 200. Alfeyev discusses these issues of ecclesiology and authority (2000) chapter 9.

> Had they repented while they were still in paradise, they would have received that paradise and nothing else. But they were cast out because of their impenitence, and afterwards repented with great weeping and tribulation . . . How great the power of penitence and tears! How great, brethren, the ocean of ineffable and unsearchable loving-kindness! For it is not only Adam whom God has honoured and glorified. All his seed, that is, we who are his sons, if we imitate his confession, his repentance, his mourning, his tears . . . share in this glory.[42]

True penitence is a synergy with God: when Jesus descended to Hell, he restored the souls 'not to paradise whence they had fallen, but to the very heaven of heavens (Ps. 68.34)'.[43] The distinction here between Eden and the new Jerusalem suggests anew that Adam was perfectly in the image of God until his disobedience; humanity, as heirs of Adam and Eve, share that potential for a restoration to God's likeness. To be restored to 'the very heaven of heavens' is to be recreated, in that parallel world we have already observed is reserved for the truly penitent. So Symeon here asserts that when repentance is expressed through mourning and weeping, it effects the theosis promised to God's creation. The Church of God is thus disclosed by Symeon as the congregation of faithful, yet imperfect people, who have the grace to know that they belong to God, and grieve at their distance their sin has placed between themselves and Him. *Penthos* offers a bridge between the two.

Having explored the internal and external evidence of Symeon's teaching, it is now time to pull together the threads of his teaching on *penthos*, and determine perhaps whether he does indeed have a 'theology of tears', in the sense not of an abstract pedagogy but an experiential and dogmatic construct, based on the Evagrian understanding of the intermingling of theology and prayer. Symeon's belief in himself as one of the links in the golden chain of charismatic power arises not from a sense of his own merit, nor solely from any original 'experience' of his own, although the autobiographical accounts of his weeping are obviously the key to much of his thought. For Symeon, to be a Christian one must have experienced an actual, conscious encounter with the living God. Such encounters may be at first hand, as in Symeon's own visions, or mediated through the witness of the *pneumatikos*, whose holy flame kindles that of the pos-

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[42] *Cat* 5, 340ff., SC 96, 404, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 99.
[43] *Cat* 5, 350–353, SC 96, 406, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 99.

tulant. Through this 'golden chain', Eulabes is the spiritual descendant of the weeping Peter who betrayed his Christ, the sorrowing Psalmist, the repentant Ninevites. By his incorporation into this mystical succession, Symeon traces his spiritual ancestry back to its earliest possible parents, and generates in his own spiritual children a succession of living saints, whose task is to keep the lamps burning, to the ages of ages.

A reinterpretation of tradition, rather than its erosion, is disclosed throughout Symeon's writing. Symeon is rooted in the sacramental life of the church. Eucharist and baptism are essential to him as the means of grace, and incorporation into the Body of Christ. Participating in the work of the Holy Spirit at baptism brings the baptised into fellowship with Christ, whose conception was brought about through that same Holy Spirit.[44] He reveres baptism as a sacred seal, which marks out Christ's own. But by understanding it in terms of betrothal rather than marriage, he articulates the incompleteness of innate, infant baptism. Water baptism requires the corroboration of this essential first promise (as in some areas of the western church, adult confirmation amplifies and completes infant baptism) through the conscious initiative of the baptised Christian, in an experience of being born again through the tears of repentance. This conscious repentance, demonstrated by tears, draws down the Holy Spirit, such that those who have experienced this are 'conformed to the glory of the image of His Son through Holy Baptism and the grace of the Holy Spirit'.[45]

To see this as an attack on the authority of the church, or as a belittling of the significance of baptism is to misread Symeon. When writing about baptism, Symeon's concern is not to define or deny the authenticity of the first *baptism*, but to affirm the authority of *tears* in effecting a subsequent and fuller—not alternative—baptism through the complete acceptance of the Holy Spirit. The actual concept of remission of post-baptismal sin was certainly not 'invented' by Symeon. As Golitzin points out:

> From the time of St Cyprian of Carthage in the 250's C.E. . . . the question of the possibility of forgiveness of mortal sin following Baptism, and who should be the agent of that forgiveness, had exercised the Christian Church.[46]

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[44] *Eth* 2, 7, 205ff., SC 122, 380–2, trans Golitzin (1995) 112–3.
[45] *Eth* 2, 7, 290ff., SC 122, 386, trans Golitzin (1995) 115.
[46] (1997) 43.

This is not to say that the Holy Spirit is absent in the first, water baptism. Symeon respects and affirms the secret mysteries of God's grace, as well as those which are more obvious.[47] But the spiritual mourning which accompanies this second sacrament effects the transition from unconscious acceptance of God, who gives himself freely and graciously, to a deliberate choice of the will. Symeon's concern, then, is with the responsibility laid on each person by the gift of free will, and how the informed exercise of it enables the conscious incorporation of each human individual into the Body of Christ. He urges the elected sons and daughters of God to grow to adult maturity and the stature of adults in the Spirit.

In every aspect of Symeon's teaching on the sacraments, and monastic and worldly life, the same emphasis on the luminosity of penitent tears is evident. They indicate the presence of the Spirit, without which no-one can become incorporated into the Body of Christ. They are accompanied by real and uncreated light, indicating the eschatological nature of mourning for sin, which enables the mourner to return to a state of purity and joy even greater than that of the first Adam, before his disobedience cast him out of Eden. Tears demonstrate that just as the first Adam chose to disobey, so the faithful in every generation may, by an act of will, repent and grieve for sins committed, and choose life in Christ.

Tears open the door into heaven, affording a glimpse of the Divine Light. Penitent weeping in Symeon is not only a monastic habit, or an optional demonstration of piety. It effects and demonstrates salvation. In viewing the journey to perfection through the lens of *penthos* Symeon not only affirms and reiterates the existing strands of a tradition eloquently expressed in both desert writings, mediated through Klimakos, and the Syrian worlds of Ephrem and Isaac. He adds to their insights about the importance of weeping and its unifying and purifying power, his own well-attested conviction of the power of the Holy Spirit which is ontologically part of the process of mourning for sin. He asserts that it is this particular expression of that power which makes public the inner illumination of the genuinely penitent, and ratifies all areas of authority assumed by monk, priest, Spiritual Father, patriarch or emperor. Symeon's understanding of the weight of such authority places him at the zenith of Byzantine monasticism,

[47] *Ch* 3, 77, SC 51, 103, trans McGuckin (1982) 95.

as well as pointing the way to the Hesychast revival of later centuries. Perhaps the most public and contentious of the subjects of this study, Symeon offers a deep-rooted knowledge of the recesses of the human heart, as well as its passionate expression.

CONCLUSION

This survey of *penthos* has visited four specific monastic exponents of the eastern Christian tradition, ranging from Sinai to Nineveh to Constantinople, covering a period of some six hundred years. Although it has revealed a great variety of insights into joybearing grief, what has been disclosed is only the tip of the iceberg in the entirety of religious thought, both in Christianity and other religions. Fundamentally, Christianity, Islam and Judaism contain a focus on the self in relation to other and the self in relation to God, however that God may be understood. Whether through 'sin', disobedience or unfaithfulness to a covenant, humanity damages that relationship with its maker, and once aware of the loss incurred, adherents of the faith seek to restore intimacy. One significant aspect of the eastern Christian take on this is that the grief at having angered or distanced God contains the seeds of hope and therefore joy—not a comfortable happiness or sense of selfrighteousness, but joy.

None of the writers appraised here sought to write a systematic analysis of penitent grief and its possibilities. Yet it is possible to piece together what amounts to a collective theological framework for the eastern Christian understanding of redemption, an exposition grounded in practical experience and the continual nurturing of the Holy Spirit. The eastern Christian looks beyond the pain and loss of Good Friday to Easter, and its iconography is not of empty tombs, knowing angels and startled mortals, but the harrowing of hell—Christ, risen from the dead, dragging Adam and Eve, the primal man and woman, from the jaws of Satan. This is costly grace, to borrow Bonhoeffer's term, costly in terms of Christ's sacrifice, and costly in terms of the discipleship it demands. Since this study has been limited to part of the early Christian tradition, it seems appropriate to draw on a specifically Christian matrix—that of the Trinity—to shape its conclusion. This perspective allows a consideration of questions of restoration to God, the integrity of the human individual, autonomy and incorporation into the Body of Christ, and the key issue of charismatic authority. In placing Klimakos, Ephrem, Isaac and Symeon within the tradition as a whole, the very issue of their shared tradition comes to the fore.

The introduction considered Hausherr's monograph on the subject, which modern scholars felt had particular weaknesses in presentation, methodology and perspective. Taking up the baton from such as theologians as Chryssavgis and Ware poses a serious challenge: the texts must speak for themselves, and must also be contextualised. However much postmodern communities may condemn 'tradition' as irrelevant, the historical and political evidence is that a coherent and vibrant eastern Christian tradition shaped the thought and life of writers such as the four under scrutiny here. Sensitivity in evaluating their motivations and awareness of their intended audience are essential. But this tradition is not ossified or entirely limited to the cloister. Because *penthos* reaches to the heart of human experiences of loss and yearning, and the desire for forgiveness, its healing and redemptive force resonances with non-monastic and contemporary spiritual experiences.

The English Metaphysical mystic, Henry Vaughan, writes in poetic form sentiments which would surely be recognised by Klimakos, seeking the 'spiritual laughter of the soul':

> . . . Then farewell joys! For while I live,
> My business here shall be to grieve:
> A grief that shall outshine all joys
> For mirth and life, yet without noise.
> A grief, whose silent dew shall breed
> Lilies and myrrh, where the cursed seed
> Did sometimes rule. A grief so bright
> 'Twill make the land of darkness light;
> And while too many sadly roam,
> Shall send me (swan-like) singing home.[1]

This poem is entitled *Jesus Weeping II*, and is outstanding as a rare example of the juxtaposition of grief and joy. Phineas Fletcher's poem *Drop, drop, slow tears*[2] of a generation earlier expresses grief for sin

[1] Henry Vaughan (1621–1695) *Jesus Weeping II.*

[2] Drop, drop, slow tears,
And bathe those beauteous feet,
Which brought from heaven
The news and Prince of peace.

Cease not, wet eyes,
His mercies to entreat;
To cry for vengeance
Sin doth never cease.

but without the hope of the Vaughan poem. Its evocative setting by Kenneth Leighton in his passiontide meditation, *Crucifixus Pro Nobis*[3] discloses a more typical western approach to penitent grief, in which the sorrow is beautifully conveyed, but little joy is evident. The same is true of Herbert Howell's rendition of the first four verses of Psalm 42 in his motet *Like as the Hart* and the *Requiem*.[4] Howell's setting of the words: 'My soul is athirst for God . . . my tears have been my meat day and night' refer in their musical idiom to the rich melancholy of Afro-American music, which from spirituals to jazz weave an evocative sense of loss and yearning into the fabric of their songs, be they spirituals or jazz or blues.

As I was completing the final revision to this book, a colleague introduced me to a book on art and weeping.[5] I was fascinated to read an account of Mark Rothko watching the tears shed in front of one of his pictures by the art historian Jane Dillenberger, who was at the time involved in a discussion group with Paul Tillich.[6] She described her emotions as peaceful and joyful—exactly the cathartic religious experience described in these texts. Wherever the emotions are allowed to connect with the soul, a grief which is full of relief and tranquillity as well as sadness may surface, and clearly this can be prompted by music, art, poetry, literature as well as theological 'sources'.

It would be going too far to say that any of these non-monastic expressions of grief for sin were within the same tradition as Klimakos et al., but they do demonstrate how pervasive such grief is within the broader religious experience, and how each composer, poet or thinker grafts their particular expression onto existing roots. For the writers considered here, though, a sense of shared heritage pervades their thought.

In your deep floods
Drown all my faults and fears;
Not let his eye
See sin, but through my tears.

Phineas Fletcher (1582–1650)

[3] 1961.

[4] This was completed in 1932, but only released for performance within the last twenty years.

[5] Elkins (2001).

[6] Elkins (2001) 2ff. and see also 152ff. for references to the desert fathers. He also discussed weeping and music in Chapter 8.

The Tradition of the Eastern Christian Church

The choice of the phrase 'eastern Christian' rather than 'Orthodox' to designate these writers has already been discussed, and does not imply that issues of orthodoxy and heterodoxy are irrelevant, merely that this is not the place to raise them. Eastern Christianity obviously shares many features with other denominations, but has peculiarities of focus which are especially striking when looking at issues of sin and redemption. The Augustinian view of humanity as a 'mass of perdition', which can be redeemed by a specific, legalistic atonement process is largely absent from the eastern Christian view, which views sin as closer to disease than deliberate wickedness, hence the prevelant use of terms such as 'spiritual physician' and an emphasis on healing. Another peculiarity of this tradition is its apparent reluctance to embrace change or diversity, and more will be said about this with regard to the issue of spiritual authority.

At its simplest level, Christian teaching follows the paradigm laid down by Christ himself, a process of teaching disciples through word and deed, and requiring them in their turn to make their own disciples. The technical term of *paradosis* denotes the handing down, from one generation to another, of doctrine and experience. Within the monastic setting, tradition is fostered by the sublimation of human paternity into obedient discipleship to the spiritual elder, whose title of Father recalls the Fathership of God, as well as indicating the respect accorded to age and experience. For Klimakos, Ephrem, Isaac and Symeon, *paradosis* is an essential. It explains the very survival of the texts themselves as a written record of wisdom from a previous generation and shapes their writings. The genre and tone of each text varies according to its particular locus within that broader tradition, but all assume a common belief that to contribute to the tradition, it is essential to have lived and worked out the spiritual dilemmas described. The concept of tradition is also referred to, obliquely or directly, by each writer in support of the claims they make about grieving for sin.

Klimakos refers to the pattern laid down by previous fathers in explaining the sequence he employs in his 'ladder'. He offers his testimony in the form of a guidebook which draws on his own spiritual autobiography. Klimakos' writings on *penthos* speak for and of the desert tradition, axiomatic to which is the placing of personal experience within the context of an inherited body of wisdom. More analytical

than many of the *Apophthegmata*, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* repeats insights sketched out by the desert fathers, adding colour and detail which reveal much about the author himself as well as his chosen topics. Klimakos provides a general overview of spiritual grief, which he defines as occupying a certain position near the start of the spiritual ascent. In according both repentance and 'mourning which causes joy' separate rungs of his ladder, Klimakos suggests that mourning for sin is not simply synonymous with repentance. This is a development of the tradition, in that earlier exponents do not tend to separate the two as cleanly. Whether classified as testimony or typikon, Klimakos' text takes a recognisably desert form.

Ephrem's use of typology illustrates a different means of keeping tradition alive, drawing on the insights not just of earlier Syrian Fathers but the Biblical paradigms. Ephrem's ascetic vocabulary clearly belongs to the Early Syrian part of the eastern Christian tradition, as does his use of typology and symbolism. A rare balance between encratism and humble acceptance of the limitations of human nature is a peculiarity of this thought-world, an aspect which spills over into Ephrem's choice of the weeping woman as a paradigm of penitent humanity. Ephrem's place within his tradition is manifested less by a sense of monastic identity (a concept not fully forged at this stage) than by belonging to the community of the faithful in the Bible. He writes within a tradition of covenant, and this can be seen in the trusting exchange between the woman and her Lord as she weeps at Jesus' feet. She breaks the covenant Eve made of old with Satan, and replaces it with the new promise of which Mary was the type. In choosing the figure of the sinful woman, and writing of her with such compassion and humanity, Ephrem points the way for a rehabilitation of womanhood within the canon of Christian redemption. The Ephremic school, in exploring a New Testament figure rather than the experience of a desert father, takes us further back into the gospel message and connects the reader more directly with the merciful love of God, mediated so vividly in this encounter with Christ himself. This profoundly Biblical mode of utterance is arguably typical of the tradition of the early Syrian period.

Isaac also interprets tradition through Biblical precedent. His writing refers openly to one of the earliest of all fathers, St. Paul, and is placed within the anthropological tradition transmitted by John of Apamea. In addition to this Syriac source, he also draws on classical Hellenistic structures for his spiritual taxonomy, and the psychological

and spiritual insights of Evagrios, as well as incorporating the desert tradition of personal experience. Isaac's most distinctive contribution to his tradition is his reworking of the established hierarchies of spiritual progression and human nature. To the existing hierarchy of penitent tears, Isaac adds the concept of distinguishing between types of tears. This allows him to describe the tears of the truly illumined penitent as overcoming the obstacles of physicality, and enabling the weeper to enter into the presence of God, suspended between the physical and pneumatic world. Although employing a rhetoric which is apparently hostile to the body, Isaac asserts that prayer which does not utilise the body is not merely incomplete, but will never come to fruition. There is, therefore, an intriguing ambivalence within Isaac to his own heritage of encratism.

Symeon demonstrates the most radical use of the concept of *paradosis*, in the working out of his relationship with Eulabes. He treats as axiomatic the desert tradition's insistence on the need for spiritual direction, the importance of submitting to authority, and the indivisibility of *theoria* and *praxis*. Like his precursors in the broader tradition, he invokes Moses as the pattern for all spiritual eldership. However, in certain aspects of Symeon's writings about the teaching of his own spiritual father there is a fresh reading of tradition which justifies the appelation 'New'. For Symeon the tradition that counts most is that of spiritual charism, handed on as links in a golden chain of which the first link was between Christ and his first apostles. This charism was denoted by tears of grief for sin, which brought the weeper into the presence of God. This was a characteristic particularly noted in connection with Eulabes, who for Symeon was the most immediate and important link in the spiritual tradition. Symeon saw Eulabes as equal to the apostles, and this is corroborated for him by his vision of light in which Eulabes stands next to God. As a link in that same chain, Symeon could therefore trace his spiritual ancestry back to the highest possible source. The basis for the metaphorical paternity of the spiritual father is the relationship between God the Father and humanity, and so the way in which joybearing grief comments on the sense of a paternal creator need evaluating.

Restoration to the Image of God: Penthos *and God the Father*

For each of the four writers, *penthos* is concerned in some way with the restoration of God's image in human beings, and with the integrity

of each person, as a subtle and symbiotic yoking together of body, soul, spirit and mind. Behind this lies the strong emphasis in eastern Christianity on humanity as being made in God's image, of sin as a falling away from God, a tarnishing of that image, and repentance in general as effecting *theosis*, the transformation of the human into divine. Ware and Chryssavgis have reminded us that patristic conventions see repentance and *penthos* as closely related, and that within monastic literature the terms are sometimes used interchangeably or without clearly stated distinctions between their meanings. Ross finds in the Syriac context a focus on kenosis as crucial to human redemption. In order to be restored to the image of God, humanity must empty itself of illusory concepts and the untruth of sin. Chryssavgis believes that there is in grief for sin not just the change of direction indicated by metanoia but a dynamism, a conscious movement propelling the penitent towards God. The penitent must exercise willingness to be transformed, to subjugate *idios* for the broader selfhood of the Spirit: Ross sees this desire as indicated by the presence of tears. This links closely to the issue of human nature being a complex compound of intellectual, physical and spiritual.

Human will operates in conjunction not only with the intellect, but with the heart, and is often demonstrated by the subjugation of the body. The subjects of this study assert, in their different ways, that all aspects of the human condition must be offered to God, in penitence and faith, for his healing. The desire to be restored is a precondition of salvation. Tears of grief for sin are the reworking of this rightly-focused desire into a useable tool. Klimakos tends not to focus much on philosophical issues of the component parts of the soul, or the different aspects of human nature. He states that 'Tears are born from the mind's thought, and the father of thoughts is a rational mind',[7] but does not analyse 'thought' or 'mind' in detail. His text presupposes the integrity of the person, and his concern is less with defining the nature of the human condition than with suggesting how a balance may be achieved, in the process of redemption, between human effort and God's grace. Klimakos paints a strikingly vivid picture of the pain experienced by the penitent. He uses vocabulary of great physicality to describe the sense of the heart being pricked by contrition, and locates the experience of *penthos* in proximity to death, graphically denoted by the worms of the grave, and also as

[7] *Step 7*, 17, 805A, trans Moore (1959) 115.

the refreshing draft of water God gives to humble monks. He acknowledges that mourners will 'flee from their own body as if it were an enemy',[8] and at the same time asserts that the truly impeccable is one 'who drenches his cheeks continually with living tears from the eye of his senses',[9] in other words, the physical and spiritual aspects of human nature labour together for redemption.

Klimakos believes the body clearly has its part to play in *penthos*. Yet this emphasis on the corporeal is balanced by the assertion that the mourner knows the 'spiritual laughter of the soul',[10] and will 'receive the resplendence of the immaterial light which is visible beyond all fire'.[11] The pure of heart will receive illumination.[12] The joyinfused grief of *penthos* brings the whole person, purified through ascesis and mourning, into the presence of God. He envisages the transformation thus effected as a resurrection experience in which 'Adam' will again be free from tears, as he was before the fall from grace.[13] This is not only the desire of human hearts but also the desire of a loving God, who 'does not wish that men mourn because of their heart's pain, but rather should rejoice in spiritual laughter, out of love for him'.[14] Human beings, being made in the image of God, may, out of a desire for integrity, seek reunification with the Divine. As God's creatures, people have the ability to choose not only integrity of the component parts of the human body, but the completeness of *theosis*.

In Ephrem, the different context and idiom produces an alternative slant to restoration and integrity. His use of typology roots his understanding of salvation in Biblical paradigms. In particular, his choice of the 'sinful woman' permits a direct vision of divine mercy in action. Human integrity is presented not through the Hellenistic lens of soul, mind and body, but the more specifically Syrian polarities of inner and outer, hidden and revealed, in which purity of heart takes precedence over external activity. The emphasis on the sinful woman's own physical attributes is significant here. Ephrem is explicit that it is by her newly re-ordered use of sexually attractive attributes that she shows her grief and is redeemed. Her long hair, her use of pre-

[8] *Step 7*, 28, 808B, trans Moore (1959) 117.
[9] *Step 7*, 42, 809A, trans Moore (1959) 118–9.
[10] *Step 7*, 40, 809A, trans Moore (1959) 118.
[11] *Step 7*, 10, 804C, trans Moore (1959) 114–5.
[12] *Step 7*, 54, 813A, trans Moore (1959) 121.
[13] *Step 7*, 45, 809C, trans Moore (1959) 119.
[14] *Step 7*, 45, 809C, trans Moore (1959) 119.

cious ointment, her kisses are the very means of her restoration to God. The human body which God gave her to dwell in is, through her tears of contrition, not only purified for her own use, but re-dedicated to God. The concept of *hayla kasya* demonstrates Ephrem's understanding that integration of inner and outer is essential for salvation. This construct uses something physical, the eye, to denote something metaphysical. The eye receives images, and also expresses what is within. The 'eye of faith' brings new meaning to an understanding of a vision of God. The visual nature of the image not only serves to bring together the physical and spiritual, the interdependence of inner and outer modes of being so fundamental to the Early Syrian thought world. It also suggests the mystic enchange of the gaze of God received by his Creature, who in turn gazes at God. This particular type of sight recalls the primal gaze of newborn infant, who can only focus the distance between its mother's face and its own face, resting on her breast. Through sight of the loved one, the soul begins its journey. Such an image of the feminine is authentic to the Syrian context, which abounds with images of motherhood, gestation and suckling as metaphors for the creative work of the Spirit, and humanity's relationship with its Creator. The eye of faith is luminous; true illumination is effected through the total mutual absorption of the inner and outer, the physical and non-physical. This lies behind Ephrem's teaching on the power of penitent tears, and is a quintessentially Syrian perspective.

Ephrem's use of typology has a broader import, too. He asserts that it is by means of a woman who is visible that it becomes possible to perceive 'the divinity which we cannot see'.[15] God, like the woman he has made in his own image, has both visible and invisible attributes. God is made visible through the Incarnation, and also through the spirit-led penitence of human men and women. The conjunction of these two modes of epiphany is seen vividly in the story of the sinful woman weeping at Jesus' feet. Mourning for sin in Ephrem thus discloses the integrity not only of the truly penitent, whose physicality has been transformed, but also of the divine economy of salvation.

In the hands of Isaac, these specifically Syrian insights are overlaid with a less local mind-set. In place of the intimacy of Ephrem's Eve/Mary typology, he posits a more overt intellectual rigour, articulated through his concern with ranking and categories of abstract

[15] *Commentary on the Diatessaron* 7, 1, trans McCarthy (1993) 129.

qualities. Wensinck commented that Isaac uses the Bible and Christian dogma as a means of ratifying his own findings. This suggests that he starts with his own thoughts and seeks to place them within the Christian tradition. Ephrem, by contrast, seems to start with the text of the Bible and develop his thoughts from that starting point. Isaac's focus on spiritual hierarchy and progress is neither unique to him nor the main thrust of his argument: when he writes of penitent tears, the abstract philosophy is stripped away and the bare bones, as it were, of the physical and spiritual experience of weeping are starkly revealed. The uneasy relationship between encratism and the human body is not fully resolved in Isaac, but when the texts that treat of pure prayer are examined closely, Isaac's dominant argument is that it is only when the body is involved in prayer and penitence that its own limitations can be transcended. It is also in that very transcendence, which Isaac describes as an ecstatic experience, that humanity finds itself in the presence of God. In asserting that tears mark the boundary between the physical and spiritual, Isaac acknowledges that pure prayer is rooted in the experience of a human person returning towards a creator God. In common with Klimakos, Isaac implies that the transformation of self is effected through a process of restoration. In becoming most fully human, the mourner becomes most God-like.

In Symeon's writings there are echoes of Klimakos which indicate their common absorbtion of the desert heritage. Symeon also sees repentance as restoring the image of God, by enabling the weeper to share in Adam's original perfection.[16] Symeon's particular emphasis here is that the desire for integrity with God must be consciously undertaken. Klimakos talks of *penthos* as the golden spur, pricking the conscience: for Symeon, it is not just the moment of contrition, but the whole experience of mourning that must be consciously recognised if it is to be valid. Whereas Isaac concerns himself with definitions and subdivisions of soul and body, Symeon focuses on the criteria for spiritual knowledge and authority over both secular and spiritual matters. The penitent has not been healed if he or she is unaware of having been touched by God, and rather than defining the nature of tears or identifying the point along the spiritual ascent that they occur, Symeon uses the very presence of heartfelt tears as the measure and marker of spiritual illumination. To describe Symeon's approach

[16] *Cat 5*, ll. 365ff., SC 96, 406, trans de Cantazaro (1980) 99–100.

as 'experiential' is, however, misleading: as already stated, it is axiomatic to the desert tradition, and the broader monastic community, that you should only teach from your own experience. Symeon's reinterpretation of this is to assert that he, himself, has experienced the vision of God, seen through his own tears, and mediated constantly by the empirical teaching and example of Eulabes.

Symeon's vision of the restoration of fallen humanity through mourning is, therefore, underpinned by his sense of continuity, not merely of Biblical paradigms (Adam restored to Eden) and desert experience, but specifically of himself constituting a link in the golden chain of illuminated elders. The luminous nature of this claim is a key aspect of his teaching. Symeon does not often write explicitly about the integration of physical and spiritual components of the human person, but his writings reveal his own insights into this. In describing ecstatic visions of divine light, Symeon articulates an epiphany of the Holy Spirit which visits only those purified and opened by weeping. Like Isaac, he affirms the primacy of spontaeous mourning over an unfocused but conventional prayer life. This is not to denigrate the human need for the parameters of the Divine Office, but to prioritise the luminosity of spirit-filled prayer.

Human Autonomy and Divine Incorporation: Penthos *and God the Son*

Issues of the right use of human will surface continually in these texts: close to the surface of the whole eastern Christian tradition is the need to subdue inappropriate human desires, and also the need to be aware of what is happening in the life of the soul. A balance between the consciousness of being capable of making choices, and willingness to renounce the self is constantly sought. When humans achieve this at some level, they imitate the selfless love of Christ. Ross's choice of the overtly Christological term *kenosis* effectively describes the loss of self-identity within mourning, even where it is not specifically used by these writers. The whole experience of desert spirituality is, in a sense, a process of kenotic withdrawal, from the world, from the body and ultimately from any sense of individual will. This makes space for 'incorporation', the Pauline concept of sharing in Christ's resurrection by sharing in his sufferings, a sense of the human person being an essential and co-dependent limb of the Body of Christ.

Of the four, Klimakos most clearly articulates a sense of *kenosis*, expressed as flight, which starts as an external process and continues as an interior movement, propelling penitents away from submission to their own will, and towards that of God. The frequent mention of the distractions and comforts of the world that colour his pages so vividly shows what a struggle this is. He writes with a compassionate, almost avuncular, appreciation of how near these temptations still are. Yet his testimony is that through the ascetic life, the penitent can and should leave this stage or aspect of his or her life behind. It is in response to the demand of the *individual* that Klimakos records his advice for the *community* as a whole. The practice of spiritual fatherhood shapes Klimakos' reponse and is implicit throughout his advice, tacitly affirming the expectation that the individual should become merged with the corporate.

Mourning, he tells us, gradually erodes the self, like the sea polishing its pebbles, and it is only when this has happened that the penitent may become incorporated into the earthly community of the monastery, and the pneumatic community of Christ and his saints. This process of loss of self necessitates a certain self-awareness (the tears must arise not from anger, frustration or disappointment, but from a conscious awareness of grief for sin). This apparent paradox can be understood as a distinction between self as motivator, and selfknowledge as a step towards theosis, the ultimate absorption of self into God. Klimakos does not often mention Christ as God's son. However, the emphasis on the love of God, which he places at the summit of his ladder, suggests the intimacy of love as Incarnate. Also, Klimakos' monastic setting was one in which was the sharing of the Eucharist brought together the individual members of the community as a symbolic and actual *synaxis*.

Ephrem expresses the distinctively early Syrian notion of inner pilgrimage as being more significane than physical peregrination. The strong sense of interiority in his writing creates a fertile ground for exploring the place of self as affected by mourning. Ephrem sees the erosion of self less as diminution than as transformation, the fulfilment of a covenant with God: it is when the 'sinful woman' relinquishes the external trappings of her life, accompanied by weeping, that her real self is revealed. The transformation process is described by Ephrem as fecundity, replacing the sterility of sin. The woman's femininity remains; the abuse of it, however, has been gloriously redeemed into a creative and redemptive state.

The writings of Ephrem and his school articulate vehemently that mourning constitutes a sharing in Christ's sufferings, and thereby a sharing in his risen life. The focus on the Lucan pericope brings the person of Christ directly into the reader's vision. The emphasis on anointing, its prefiguring of the embalming of Christ, is a most potent symbol of participation and incorporation into the Son of God. As Ephrem himself tells us, the oil jar is a 'treasury of types',[17] indicating not just Christ's willing acceptance of death, but also his Kingship. Through incorporation into the Body of Christ, the mourner therefore comes to share in the Kingdom. More explicitly than Klimakos, Ephrem articulates the Incarnation of Jesus Christ as the expression of God's mercy. It is this mercy which is extended to the penitent who weeps, in fuller measure than to the righteous Pharisee who Luke tells us is critical of the woman's actions, and in experiencing this mercy, the woman knows real joy.

Isaac's use of hierarchies underlies a recurring discussion of the need to subdue the will and self-desire, through mourning. When individualism is mentioned in his writings, for example the monk who laments his sins so much that he is unable to complete the Divine Office, the emphasis is on the primacy of the luminous, ecstatic event, not the antinomy of the monk. In this he pre-figures Symeon, who also mentions weeping during the Office, and simply advises that the monk so overcome should quietly withdraw, in order not to distract his fellows. For Isaac, submission of the individual will is not described in the context of traditional desert constructs of the mediation of spiritual fatherhood, which is so evident in Klimakos and Symeon. A more direct kinship with God is implied. Likewise, the incorporation into God is seen less through the mediation of the Son, but through the obedience and fear of the child for the Father. The monk as mourner fears the loss of God's favour; he longs for the purity his tears will bring, and the vision of God that will ensue. The love and fear which shape the relationship between mourner and God are not, in general, articulated through the mediation of Christ.

For Symeon, the issue of the spiritual athlete's own will is set firmly in the context of spiritual fatherhood. He describes Eulabes as equal to the Apostles and his luminous vision shows Eulabes accompanied by Christ himself. So in submitting the desire of the individual to the spiritual father, the penitent responds directly to Christ's law.

[17] *Hymn 6 on Virginity*, 7, trans McVey (1989) 289.

The *Ethical Discourses* reiterate that this sort of obedience requires effort and discernment: free will is axiomatic to human nature. As with the issue of the baptism of tears, for Symeon it is always the *consciousness* of the conversion event that matters. An innate humility, like the process of infant baptism, is, for Symeon, insufficient for spiritual perfection, a perspective which perhaps owes something to Isaac.

Symeon sees the spiritual elder/child relationship as the model for incorporation into the body of Christ. By describing Eulabes as a Moses figure, he suggests that if he himself becomes incorporated with Eulabes through ascesis and obedience, he, too, will stand on hallowed ground, and enter directly into the presence of God. Like Klimakos, Symeon asserts that repentance accompanied by tears can lead to participation in the perfection of the pre-lapse Adam.[18] Such an incorporation with God is an eschatological event, uniting humanity in this world with the pre-existent Son.

Symeon's injunction that one should not receive at the Eucharist without penitent tears shows both his strong debt to Eulabes, who taught this doctrine, and a deep reverence for the Church's most powerful enactment of incorporation. For Symeon, incorporation into Christ is always set in a sacramental context, be it Eucharist or Baptism. In asserting that penitent tears constitute a second Baptism, Symeon affirms the importance of their *conscious* nature: it is only when the human will is engaged, not suppressed, that penitent grief occurs and restores the mourner to unity with God.

In various ways then, all four authors see *penthos* as articulating humanity's relationship with Christ. Penitent tears erode the selfishness of the human condition, a kenotic act which allows space for incorporation into Christ. A proper selfknowledge enables the penitent to yearn for restoration to God as a conscious choice, which is joyful because it constitutes the homecoming of a prodigal. A key impetus to this dynamic shift is the work of the Holy Spirit, whose role is variously interpreted by these four authors.

Charismatic Authority: Penthos *and the Holy Spirit*

The monastic tradition values highly the quality of discernment (*diakrisis*) which empowers human decisions. It is Spirit-filled discernment which

[18] *Cat 5*, ll. 304ff., SC 96, 404, trans de Cantazaro (1990) 99.

distinguishes tears of remorse from tears of anger. It is the Spirit which prompts the free will to choose the way of truth and freedom rather then to fall into the abyss. In Klimakos, spiritual discernment is found in the distinction he makes between good and bad tears. He suggests that tears become or remain holy when they spring from true penitence, the fruit of a heart pricked by contrition. It is typical of Klimakos to use a physical image, the spur of a rider, to describe a pneumatic awakening. His world is one of physical extremes: the prison of the penintents, the peace of the final welcome into God's love. There is not, in his work, much high-flown language articulating the Spirit as an abstract concept. Klimakos' vivid linguistic gift lends itself to describing the tangible, which is valuable because it acknowledges that this is where the beginner—to whom he is writing—still lives. The authority conferred by the truly spiritually illuminated is meted out through the relationship between spiritual elder and child. Heartfelt repentance, articulated by tears, purifies spiritual athletes so that they may become spiritual elders themselves.

In Ephrem, *hayla kasya* is the epitome of the work of the Spirit. The concept of the 'luminous eye of faith' may be seen as a metaphor for the conjunction of the inner and outer aspects of self. Only when the internal and external are in balance can the penitent acquire luminosity. It is the Spirit, evoked and expressed through mourning, that transforms the sterility of sin into the fecundity of repentance. It is the Spirit moving in the heart of the sinful woman which prompts her to reject Satan and the perfume seller and turn to Christ. Ephrem thus portrays the Spirit as a dynamic, life-giving power. Luke presents the woman's tears and her love for Jesus as conferring on her greater gifts than those obtained by the upright Pharisee, using a parable of indebtedness. Ephrem and his school focus on the inner conflicts the woman herself faces in coming to penitence, and the contrast between her struggle with her conscience, and the immediate willingness of Mary. The typology of womanhood employed thus demonstrates the new life of forgiveness which is offered by penitent, spirit-filled tears, and offers a view of the female as not merely capable of redemption, but also exemplifying the humility and openness necessary to attain salvation.

Isaac is as reticent about naming the Spirit as he is about the Son, yet his placing of the spiritual side of humanity at the apex of his anthropological hierarchy reveals a strong sense of the spiritual in his writings. He suggests that the human spirit is enlivened by the Holy

Spirit. In describing the monk's identity as one who mourns, Isaac asserts that this most ideal of states is one in which the individual is so absorbed by the life of the Spirit that other aspects of human activity and consciousness assume minor importance. To achieve the condition of being a mourner requires the greatest possible degree of spiritual illumination. In the image Isaac uses of the ship of repentance piloted by fear, sailing to the haven of divine love,[19] the movement of the Spirit is seen, mirroring the Spirit's movement over the face of the waters in the act of Creation.

In Klimakos, Ephrem and Isaac, there are hints of a doctrine of the spiritual power of penitent tears. In Symeon, this aspect is far more highly developed. As already noted, the two main influences on his thought were the teaching and example of a man noted for mourning, and his own experience of luminous tears. Symeon synthesises this dual thread into what amounts to a doctrine, that the presence of holy tears indicate the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. Such tears are the real measure of spiritual perfection because they are luminous and bring the one who weeps into the presence of God. This is noticeable in two aspects of Symeon's teachings. First, that tears constitute a second baptism which is not the type of the truth but the truth itself. Symeon works with, and extends, an existing tradition of a multiplicity of types of Baptism, and his melding of the tradition of Gregory Nazianzen and John of Damascus with the Syrian language of typology shows the breadth of his scope, and his very particular style of reappropriating his spiritual inheritance. Symeon's focus on baptism is significant because of the reverence it demonstrates that Symeon has for the sacrament which is the point of entry into the life of the Church. Secondly, the conflict with Stephen of Niocomedia is sharply illuminated by issues of spiritual authority. Symeon's criticism is that Stephen attempted to operate without the ratification of spiritual authority. If for Symeon, tears indicate the presence of the Spirit, and one must not claim authority without being filled with the Spirit, then tears are not a peripheral aspect of ascesis, but fundamental to the Christian life, and this impacts on secular and political as well as ecclesial matters.

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[19] *Homily 46*, trans Miller (1984) 224, cf. *Second Part*, V, 14, trans Brock (1995) 8.

Summary of the Patristic Teachings on Penthos

In summarising the thoughts of our four authors, significant common emphases have been disclosed. Each of these four writers typifies his milieu and one particular area of the eastern Christian tradition. Within the organic unity that comprises the tradition of that Church, they each speak with particular clarity of the centrality of *penthos* in their own life and in their perception of the life of the Christian church at large, albeit confined within a monastic context. Taken as a whole, it is possible to abstract from their teachings a theological construct of penthotic thought. Grieving for sin is allied to but not coterminous with repentance. More obviously than repentance, mourning is the body's mode of utterance, an expression of sorrow and loss which occupies the whole human being, uniting it beyond its anthropological divisions, and mirroring in its unity the divine unity of the Godhead and creation itself. Weeping for sin transforms the human being, not just through individual spiritual maturation, but through incorporation into the Body and Church of Christ. The integrity of body, soul, mind and spirit reflect the unity of the Trinity. The healing of the brokenness of sin and reintegration effected through mourning, reflects the unity of the dual nature of Christ. The restoration of Adam to a new Eden shows that the world which was darkened by his fault has been repristinated. In this new creation of sins forgiven, human autonomy is subsumed into God's will. Human law is replaced by God's law. The suffering of the mourner is a sharing in the suffering of Christ, and having died with Christ, the penitent may also rise with him.[20] Far more than repentance, *penthos* is joybearing, because of the new life it offers. Because it 'assumes' the whole person, body and soul, joybearing grief effects, in Gregory of Nyssa's terms, a total redemption.

The process of spiritual eldership and other forms of monastic guidance has its provenance in Christ himself. Both as obedient Son, and as leader of disciples, Jesus provided a role model for the spiritual chain which Symeon uses as an image. In choosing as disciple and bedrock of his Church the person of Simon Peter, who wept bitterly at his betrayal of his Lord but also articulated his identity as anointed Son of God,[21] Christ placed a model of penitent grief

[20] Romans 6.8.
[21] Mark 8.29.

at the heart of the Christian tradition. The ambivalent qualities of Peter also suggest that whilst perfection is to be aimed at, failing to achieve it is forgivable. This very eastern understanding of redemption is peculiarly served by the apparent paradox of joyful grief.

Uniquely, Klimakos affirms the possibility of *penthos* being experienced by married people: doubtless, more could be discovered about its place outside the monastery. Obviously, this survey only covers a small proportion of expositions of joy-bearing grief: equally, the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, Cassian, Margery of Kempe and John of the Cross could be explored. The presence of something like *penthos* in the Islamic Sufi tradition has been noted.[22] Feminist theologians and writers might well want to consider further Ephrem's unusual and striking focus on a woman as the exegete of redemptive grief. Although firmly rooted in the Medieval Mediterranean world, joy-bearing grief is by no means confined to that geographical or historical milieu. It remains to give some closing comments on the essential paradox of the subject, and to suggest ways in which penitent grief and tears of contrition may be joy-bearing.

Joy-bearing Grief

The actual phrase 'joy-bearing grief' is first articulated by Klimakos as the title of *Step 7*. He touches on this paradox again briefly in Sections 7 and 9, where he contrasts tears of fear (which intercede) with 'tears of all-holy love', which demonstrate the acceptance of prayer. Section 9 talks of the 'blessed joy-grief of holy compunction' which elevates the penitent to Christ. Joy-bearing grief is an ecstatic experience: Chryssavgis notes that neither holy fear nor holy joy are purely human emotions. In transcending the limitations of human thought and emotion, *penthos* restores humanity to its original state of purity, to a time before grief and sin had entered the created order. According to the liturgy, Adam wept as he was banished from Eden. Christian imagery balances the first and second Adam, Eden and the New Jerusalem: it is no coincidence that in *Step 7*, 45 Klimakos quotes Revelation 7.17:

[22] Sulaimân ad-Dârânî (d. 830), Grunebaum (1946) 134.

> Before his transgression, Adam has no tears, just as there will be none after the resurrection when sin will be abolished; for pain, sorrow and sighing will then have fled away.[23]

In other words, through tears, the penitent is led to a land where there are no tears. This resonates with Isaac's teaching that the purified body will eventually take leave of tears, in an apophatic state of ecstatic illumination. Without tears, this transition cannot take place. Tears demonstrate the start of conscious life, physically and spiritually. They accompany the process of redemption, rather than constituting its *telos*; this is why patristic writers allow themselves some licence on the issue of when and how tears occur. Just as in physical growth, each individual varies, so in spiritual maturation, each person moves at their own pace. Through weeping, they can move eschatologically from this world to the next, as divine intervention 'transforms painful tears into painless ones'.[24] *Penthos* brings the penitent full circle, from humanity's instigation in Eden to the eternal joys of paradise. This is why, as a concept, it is central and not peripheral to Christian experience.

The divine impetus of *penthos* is always significant. These tears are not born of anger, frustration or despair, although the patristic tradition recognised the presence of these human emotions. They are a 'gift from the Lord'[25] and cannot be commanded, but may be drawn down by humility and prayer.

At the start of this conclusion, issues of the self and the other were raised. One aspect of the joyfulness of *penthos* is that it is other-oriented. This is expressed in a number of ways—as kenosis, as a specific incident of grieving for a fellow monk's sins, as identifying with cosmic pain and suffering. Although joy-bearing grief has to be experienced by the individual, it is not authentic is undertaken in a sense of self-righteousness or with a grasping desire for advancement. Yes, it benefits the individual by conferring redemption, but this is seen as a gracious gift and not an automatic right. And redemption is not so much about individual perfection as the absorption of 'self' into the Godhead, a liberation of the individual which constitutes the greater unity and integrity of theosis.

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[23] 809C, Moore (1959) 119.
[24] *Step 7*, 55, Moore (1959) 121.
[25] *Step 7*, 49, Moore (1959) 120.

Perhaps a comparable example of other-oriented love, a process undergone for the benefit of the other, may be seen in the images of gestation and birth which recur in these texts. Klimakos pays lipservice to this; Isaac, in *Homily 64*, merely employs the conventional idiom of repentance as the daughter of stillness and the mother of the life to come. But Symeon and Ephrem, in different ways, explore this image in a manner which goes far beyond the use of metaphor.

For Symeon, conscious knowledge of the spirit is essential: it marks the authority which ratifies secular behaviour as well as personal growth. Tears indicate to him that spiritual consciousness is present. His choice of image for this (predominantly found in *Ethical Discourse 10*) is that of the child stirring in the womb. This he sees an analogous to someone knowing that Christ is within them. Other instances of his use of pregnancy and birth imagery have been commented on, but this is the most powerful expression of his key teaching: consciousness is essential, and engenders life. Conscious acceptance of God, through tears, is experienced by the whole body. It grows inside you, it requires struggle and effort to be born, and its fruits are joyful new life. There can be no life without gestation, and no full-term gestation without the acute sense of the spirit moving within. Motherhood, a prime example of human selflessness, of 'carrying' another, is thus used to describe the spiritual passage from fallenness to redemption. Maternal imagery is also used, on at least two occasions: an image of Christ as a radiant and sweet breast, which appears to 'as many as are still infants in Christ' and is 'placed in the mouth of their intellect to suckle them'.[26]

Ephrem's use of images of reproduction is even more subtle. He, and other writers of the period, speak specifically of the sterility of sin and the fecundity of penitence. The tears of the 'sinful woman' are the waters of spiritual rebirth. Her labourpangs are the grief she expresses at the feet of Jesus; her child is the tenderness with which Jesus affirms her acceptance, with all her flaws, over and above the Pharisee. The choice in these early Syriac texts of women who are ritually unclean allows extended typology and imagery; the unclean womb is healed by one born of a pure womb. This can be read not as negative comment on the impurity, but as affirmation of the uniquely

[26] *Eth* 4, SC 129, trans Golitzin (1996) 20, cf. *Hymn* 28, 183, trans Maloney (1975) 151.

creative role that women can play, hence Ephrem's adoption of the 'sinful woman' into the Mary/Eve typology which dominates his writings.

Joy-bearing grief constitutes a rebirth, the start of new life in Christ. Like any human birth, it entails a subordination of self to the other, to the being within, and it necessitates a long, painful and humbling process. The tears of grief for sin are not the end itself, but accompany the process of engendering true spiritual life. This is why *penthos* is truly joy-bearing grief. The Fathers stated it. The Mothers knew it to be so!

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GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS USED

abila	mourning, literally bitterness of soul; *abiluta* state of mourning.
acedia (ἀκηδια)	the condition of listless depression and hopelessness, a lack of focus experienced by those who are distracted by the world. Known as "the noon-tide demon".
anachoresis (ἀναχώρησις)	withdrawal from the world, the condition of a hermit.
apatheia (ἀπάθεια)	dispassion, the condition of being disengaged from human emotions and demands, in such a way as to engender purity of heart.
bnay (bar/bat) qyama	children (son/daughter)of the covenant.
btul(t)a	a virgin, person living in celibacy, and by extension a pure life style.
diakrisis (διάκρισις)	discernment, the ability to recognize the authenticity of an emotion and to discriminate from among a number of conditions the appropriate one to be adopted.
hayla kasya	the luminous 'eye of faith' acquired by those who experience pure prayer, which enables them to understand the types and symbols of holy things in the world around them.
hesychia (ἡσυχία)	"a state of inner tranquility or mental quietude and concentration which arises in conjunction with, and is deepened by, the practice of pure prayer and the guarding of the heart." *Philokalia* vol. 1, 365.
Ihidaya	literally, unique, single, by extension one who not only lives as a single person, but is single-minded in his or her devotion to God. Applied to monks as a descriptive term.
kairos (καιρός)	the appropriate time for something to happen, the right season.
katanuxis (κατάνυξις)	contrition, compunction, the sense of the heart being pricked into consciousness of wrongdoing, "a mingled feeling of sorrow, tenderness and joy, springing from sincere repentance". *Philokalia* vol. 1, 358.
logismos, pl logismoi (λογισμός)	thought, or the impetus behind thought, especially where it is inspired by demonic intervention, the concept or image behind the process of thought.
lype (λύπη)	sadness, sorrow, grief, mourning, "often with the sense of 'godly sorrow'—the sorrow which nourishes the soul with the hope engendered by repentance." *Philokalia* vol. 1, p. 365.
paradosis (παράδοσις)	tradition, the transmission of an inheritance of spiritual wisdom from one generation to another.
penthos (πένθος)	compunction, contrition, remorse, spiritual mourning; a state of awareness of sins which is expressed by weeping.

Qaddisha	literally 'holy', in the Early Syrian context taken to mean a married person who lives a celibate life within marriage.
sunedesis (συνείδησις)	the human conscience, the ability to recognise right and wrong and decide between them.
theosis (θέωσις)	divinisation, the condition of humankind being sanctified into the likeness of God.
xenitea (ξενιτεία)	a state of exile, metaphorical or actual, being or living as a foreigner.

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